Ineradicable Rhythms:
Identity and Community History in
Absalom, Absalom! and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

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ABSTRACT

This study will argue that the various ways characters perceive and imagine time in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* reflect their attempts to derive spiritual fulfillment and moral validation from the communities with which they identify. They imagine their communities—the South in *Absalom, Absalom!* and Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*—as organized around dynastic families whose privileged position is perpetuated by a continuous and unbroken chain of legitimate heirs. Two major forces threaten these historical narratives: the deterioration of class divisions, which are imagined to be impermeable, and the rise of national imagined communities and historical narratives that displace and disrupt the earlier dynastic narratives of both communities. The failure of the dynastic historical narratives that empower the Sutpen, Compson and Buendía families cause the characters of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* to reimagine the time, either as something that ended with the destruction of their imagined communities or as an incomprehensible succession of unrelated presents. Neither option allows the characters of either novel to imagine a spiritually rewarding future for themselves.

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Introduction: Time, History and Community

"Angels (they say) don't know whether it is the living
they are moving among, or the dead. The eternal torrent
whirls all ages around in it, through both realms
forever, and their voices are drowned out in its thunderous
roar"—Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that the historical narratives which legitimize modern nation-states are compelling because they represent "a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning," providing "the links between the dead and the yet unborn" (11). The nation-state is a relatively new historical phenomenon, and its development required a new way of understanding time, one which would make their narratives both possible and believable. It required individuals, in the words of Georg Lukacs, "to comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned" (24). This historical comprehension does not represent an improved understanding of time's objective reality, but a new, powerful and uniquely flawed way of imagining that reality. The historical imagination which sustains nation-states and other related imagined communities has not gone unchallenged, however, and those challenges represent a serious threat to the individuals who derive their meaning from their membership in such communities. Both William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* depict the crises that befall individuals whose historical comprehension of themselves and their communities is challenged and disrupted by the destruction or displacement of those communities.

In both novels, the principal characters identify with a community—the American South in *Absalom, Absalom!* and Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*—whose social order is gradually or suddenly displaced by a larger, economically and politically dominant national community. This identification is mediated by family dynasties—Sutpen, Compson and Buendía—that provide the conceptual connection between the individual and the larger community. As Macondo and the South lose their political autonomy to the national government, the privileged positions of those dynasties, justified as they were by the old historical narratives of their regional communities, become insecure and irrelevant. The gulf between historical narrative and political reality is of existential importance to the characters of both novels, who lose their only way of imagining productive and meaningful futures for themselves.

This study will examine how the characters of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* imagine time to justify their belief in the historical narratives of their imagined communities, how the idea of the family as a historical entity is used to connect individuals to the history of their communities, and how characters reimagine time and their place within it when the narratives of their imagined communities are challenged by the changing political reality of the world in which they live. This introduction will describe the ways of imagining time that emerge in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and the connection between these types of times and the historical narratives that they either naturalize or undermine. The subsequent chapters will analyze how the link between individual, family, and community is imagined and challenged in each novel, first in *Absalom, Absalom!* and then in *One Hundred Years of Solitud*e.

The premise of this study is that conflict between the historical narratives of local communities and those of nations is part of a larger competition between various ways of conceptualizing time. The idea of time as a continuous history that connects "the dead and the yet unborn" is just one of the several ways of imagining time depicted in both novels, but it is the only one which naturalizes and justifies the patterns of social division on which the Sutpen, Compson and Buendía families depend.

Though there is significant overlap between the types of time that characterize *Absalom, Absalom!* and those that appear in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, it is worth identifying each of the ways of imagining time found in *Absalom, Absalom!* before identifying those that are unique to García Márquez's novel.

There are four main ways of imagining time depicted in *Absalom, Absalom!*. The first, "no time," perceives the world as unmarked by calendrical, historical time. These are the terms in which Thomas Sutpen and his narrators describe his childhood. In many ways, it resembles the medieval understanding of time described by Walter Benjamin and Benedict Anderson. Anderson explains that "the medieval Christian mind had no conception of history as an endless chain of cause and effect or of radical separations between past and present" (Anderson 23). This echoes Quentin Compson's retelling of Thomas Sutpen's childhood journey back to Tidewater Virginia, which occurred without "a definite beginning or a definite ending" (*Absalom* 182). This no-time, as it is imagined by the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*, who understand themselves historically, resembles the chaos perceived by Benjamin's Angel of History, who sees "one single catastrophe" where "we perceive a chain of events" (Benjamin 257). Those who live without a conception of historical time are believed to be "brutely evacuated into a world without hope or purpose" (*Absalom*

190). In *Absalom, Absalom!*, no-time is the mental state which the upper class of southern society projects onto the lower. The reader is never presented with this type of ahistorical thinking unfiltered by a narrator who understands the world historically. The negative connotations of "no-time" are ubiquitous because the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* locate meaning in history and cannot imagine living without it.

No-time is the state out of which the second type of time, historical time, emerges. It is historical thinking about time that allows the antebellum South to imagine itself as a dynastic class and then to reimagine itself as an autonomous regional-national community in response to the nationalizing pressure of Civil War. Anderson argues that "what has come to take the place of the mediaeval conception of simultaneity-along-time is, to borrow again from Benjamin, an idea of 'homogenous, empty time,' in which simultaneity is, as it were, transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar" (24). This is the time in which one can imagine and articulate history as a "chain of events." Benjamin asserts that "the concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogenous, empty time" (261). Whatever the political ideology of "progress" may be, the relevant point is that any narrative understanding of history, one which provides meaning for the present by imputing a future as the logical consequence of the past, depends upon "the belief that the fundamental structure of the past is economically and ideologically the same as that of the present," that history proceeds "in a superficial, unilinear, evolutionary way" (Lukacs 176).

Benjamin argues that "in every era an attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it," saying, "only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly

convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious" (255). In building the Sutpen narrative, the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* do largely the opposite. They attempt to make the "image of the past" conform to the historical narrative through which they understand themselves. Sutpen himself performs a similar revision of history to appropriate the values and meaning offered by membership in the imagined community of the South. The creation of imagined community history depends upon denying difference between the world of the past and the world of the present.

The third type of time present in *Absalom, Absalom!* is nationalizing time. Because imagined-community history depends on continuity, it cannot permit any radical re-imagination of social order. Imagining time historically quickly leads to imagining time and history as coterminous. In *Unknowing*, Philip Weinstein explains that, "realism denies that it has stacked the deck (or pre-arranged the cards), insisting instead on its protagonist as a free-standing subject moving within a lawful and indifferent frame" (2). This "lawful and indifferent frame" is the imagined community history of the protagonist's society. Thus one historical narrative of an imagined community excludes all others. The United States and the South cannot have equally valid claims on Southern history in the minds of its inhabitants, and the ideological rift which causes the Civil War also prevents the Southern narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* from accepting reunification. Because those who imagine time historically see history and time as two names for the same process, the emergence of a new historical narrative also represents a new way for measuring and conceptualizing time. The nationalizing historical narrative of the United States represents a new way of understanding time, one which is inimical to and repressed by the Southern narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*

Philip Weinstein writes that "no social cohesion can occur without normative scripts for how individuals are to sustain identity in space and time" (*Unknowing* 3). People can make sense of the world by identifying with certain imagined communities—religious, dynastic, national—which give the individual meaning by uniting him with other individuals across history. These communities are essential identities; even though all of the members of a given community will die and be replaced with new and distinct individuals, some intangible and intrinsic element of the community remains unchanged in the minds of those who believe in it. These communities draw their emotional power from their ability to give trans-temporal order to the world. The extent to which these ideas are compelling sources of identity depends on the persuasiveness of their historical narration. Anderson explains those who identify with nations or their imagined equivalents—in this case of *Absalom, Absalom!*, the South—possess an "awareness of being embedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity" which "engenders the need for a narrative of 'identity'" (205). The borderline compulsiveness with which Quentin Compson, his father Mr. Compson, and their neighbor Rosa Coldfield work to make sense of the Sutpen story is a product of the tension between an "awareness of continuity" and the historical rupture of the Civil War.

The fourth model of time depicted in *Absalom, Absalom!* is "situational" time. This conception of time is historical, but it imagines history as a series of ruptures and breaks in continuity, rather than as a smooth and understandable passage through homogenous, empty time. Benjamin explains that "a historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop" (262). This is the position in which Quentin Compson finds himself. The imagined community history of the South fails to explain the forty years

which have elapsed since the end of the Civil War, and there is a feeling that for the Southern narrators of the Sutpen story, nothing of meaning has happened in all that time. Sartre describes a similar type of "suspended time" in his essay on *The Sound and the Fury*. He writes that the narrative present of *The Sound and The Fury* "is suspension," a term he uses to describe the sensation of "arrested motion in time" (227). The present is "irrational in its essence; it is an event, monstrous and incomprehensible…beyond this present, there is nothing, since the future does not exist" (226). *Absalom, Absalom!,* which ends only months before Quentin Compson's suicide on June 10 of 1910, contains the seeds of this "suspended time", though they do not yet dominate its narrative mode. The reader who remembers the incomprehensibility of Quentin Compson's present in *The Sound and The Fury* can interpret his failure to recalibrate the relationship between his identity and the imagined-community history of the South in *Absalom, Absalom!* as a contributing factor to his ultimate mental breakdown. Time has come to a stop and Quentin Compson is presented with two options: he "can grasp the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one" (Benjamin 263) and acknowledge the situational and momentary, rather than eternal, relationship which the modern South has with its past and, in doing so, destabilize the social divisions which give order and meaning to his world, or he can cling to the continuous narrative of Southern history and live as a ghost. The unresolved tension between these two unsatisfying alternatives renders his present "monstrous and inexplicable."

No-time, historical time, nationalizing time and situational time all reappear in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, though their importance and function in the novel are slightly different. Almost all of the characters of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* begin the novel enmeshed in the historical narrative of the Buendía, and little time is spent

imagining a pre-historical world. Only Remedios, the Beauty, the idiot-savant daughter of José Arcadio and Santa Sofía de la Piedad, experiences "no-time," and even then it is largely removed from the negative connotations and anxiety which it inspires in the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*. Similarly, situational time plays a limited but important role in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. It is experienced by a single character, Colonel Aureliano Buendía. Like Quentin Compson, Colonel Aureliano Buendía is torn from the historical narrative through which he once understood himself by civil war, and he begins to see the present as disconnected from the past. "Beyond this present," he sees "nothing, since the future does not exist" (Sartre 226). His experiences, like those of Quentin *in Absalom, Absalom!*, illustrate the myths and illusions which sustain the historical thinking of the other members of the Buendía family.

Historical time is the dominant way of imagining time in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and it is essentially the same as in *Absalom, Absalom!* It is the calendrical, empty time in which communities are built and imagined. When José Arcadio Buendía begins to think about Macondo and the Buendía family in historical terms, this is the type of time he attempts to reify by synchronizing Macondo's clocks. All of the characters who imagine the future and past of the Buendía family conceptualize time in this way. When this understanding of time is challenged by displacement of the Buendía family from the historical narrative of Macondo, the characters who once defined themselves in relation to the imagined-community history of the Buendía family must either abandon time and community altogether, as does Colonel Aureliano Buendía, or begin to imagine themselves as ghosts, as do José Arcadio Buendía, José Arcadio Segundo, and Aureliano Babilonia.

Nationalizing time plays a more explicit role in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* than it does in *Absalom, Absalom!*, because the process that displaces the Buendía family from the center of Macondo and establishes a national historical narrative is presented directly to the reader by the omniscient narrator of the novel. This displacement represents a direct challenge to the validity of the Buendías' historical narrative , and they must either become ghosts or abandon the historical narrative which has traditionally given them meaning. The impotence of the Buendía family to seriously challenge the nationalization of Colombia's imagined community gives the national historical narrative the veneer of "destiny" and reinforces its status as an alternative way of imagining time, on par with the original historical narrative of the Buendías.

Two new types of time emerge in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: natural time and cyclical time. Natural time refers to the objective and unidirectional movement of world through time, unmediated by any presupposed social order. It is not a way of imagining or organizing time, but the entropic force that determines time's directionality. Time does not actually constitute a "lawful and indifferent frame," but rather an essentially destructive force that works against the permanence of all things, including social orders. The historical time of the Buendía family and the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* is an attempt to acknowledge the passage of time without threatening the continuity of the imagined communities through which they define themselves. The problem that confronts them is that time—objective time, natural time—does not actually operate according to the principles which they ascribe to it. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the Civil War and the consequent destruction of the Southern aristocracy is the nearest equivalent to the action of natural time: although the result of human and social factors, it nonetheless occurs outside the logic of historical time,

affecting the narrative world with an inevitable, incomprehensible and destructive force. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the operation of natural time is more visible because the passing of time is portrayed as a physical and entropic phenomenon as well as a mode of organizing and explaining experience. Macondo and the Buendía family are not internally static entities moving through time, they are constantly changing, constantly degrading, associations of people across time and space. As Macondo moves further away from its founding, it resembles less and less the town imagined by José Arcadio Buendía. The main conflict of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is between natural time and those who seek to define themselves through the imagined-community history of the Buendía family.

The second type of time that arises in *One Hundred Years of Solicitude* is cyclical time. This type of time, largely invisible in *Absalom, Absalom!*, is the result of the ongoing conflict between historical time and natural time. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, where the struggle between natural time and historical time is more prolonged, the repeated efforts of members of the Buendía family to make their present conform to the historical narrative of the family causes "time" to repeat itself. The illusion of cyclical time is produced by characters who attempt to breathe new life into a family and community structure that no longer exists.

The conflict between two competing historical narratives—one regional and one national—lies at the heart of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. This conflict represents an existential threat to the characters of both novels, who see their ways of making sense of themselves displaced by a new and alien narrative. This conflict reveals historical time to be just one of many ways of perceiving and imagining time. It causes some characters, like Quentin Compson and Colonel Aureliano Buendía, to lose any way of identifying with the history of their

communities, and it causes others, like Rosa Coldfield and José Arcadio Buendía, to see themselves as ghosts of imagined-community histories which have already ended. But equally important, it causes local historical narratives to be recast in the vocabulary of nationalism in an attempt to preserve the old social orders of Macondo and the South while placing them on even ideological footing with the new national narratives that seek to displace them.

Anderson writes that "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (6). It must be remembered, however, that communities are rarely experienced as, or acknowledged to be, imagined. The persistence of any imagined community depends on its ability to make sense of experience, its ideological persuasiveness. Anderson explains, for example, that multiple "national" identities can exist within a single "nation." He writes that "many 'old nations,' once thought fully consolidated, find themselves challenged by 'sub'-nationalism within their borders — nationalisms which, naturally, dream of shedding this sub-ness one happy day" (3). Sovereignty is an important goal for any nation, because it is the imagined coherence and independence of the nation which makes it a stable base from which to articulate identity, but a nation can be imagined as deserving sovereignty before it is achieved and after it is lost.

The narrators of the Sutpen story cannot foresee a future in which the South regains its sovereignty, but they have not ceased to imagine it as spiritually autonomous from the United States. The same symbols which mark the separation of one country from the next—the geographic continuity and homogeneity of the nation versus the discontinuity between nations, the internal cohesion of the nation versus

the disparate qualities of separate nations, the internal connectedness of national history versus the independent development of unrelated national histories—are used to separate the North from the South, even though they are politically and economically intertwined. The incongruity of these imagined regional "nations" with historical reality is one of the problems of *Absalom, Absalom!*.

This incongruity is complicated by the disjunction between the dynastic order of the antebellum South and the modern South's national understanding of Southern history. Anderson points out that the emphasis that historical thinking places on continuity distorts and obscures historical changes in how communities perceive themselves. He explains, "We may today think of the French aristocracy of the *ancien régime* as a class; but surely it was imagined this way only very late. To the question 'Who is the Comte de X?' the normal answer would have been, not 'a member of the aristocracy,' but 'the lord of X,' 'the uncle of the Baronne de Y,' or 'a client of the Duc of Z'" (Anderson 6-7). Something similar happens in *Absalom, Absalom!*. When Quentin and the other narrators talk about the South, they focus the bulk of their attention on a slender class of Southerners, but they never address the discrepancy between the regional identity suggested by "The South" and the class identity which they actually articulate. In the antebellum South, like pre-modern Europe, "the fundamental conceptions about 'social groups' were centripetal and hierarchical, rather than boundary-oriented and horizontal" (15). The dominant forms of social organization are between master and slave, lord and tenant. These relationships are imagined to be eternal and unchanging. It is only among a small class of individuals that history plays a role in identity. These relationships among the aristocracy, which are predicated upon the stable and unchanging relationship between black and white, poor and rich, are dynastic, rather than national. The rhetoric of Southern nationhood

employed by the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* should be read as a counter-move intended to shield the old social order of the antebellum South from the increasingly powerful national historical narrative of the United States. Anderson writes that "as late as 1914, dynastic states made up the majority of the membership of the world political system, but…many dynasts had for some time been reaching for a 'national' cachet as the old principle of Legitimacy withered silently away" (22). The same movement accounts for the elision of class and region in *Absalom, Absalom!*. Confronted by the national imagination of the United States, Southerners begin to think of themselves in national terms as well.

A similar process occurs in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Many of the early Buendías, most obviously José Arcadio Buendía, see Macondo as politically autonomous from the rest of the Colombia and understand its social order as one organized around the Buendía family rather than beholden to any external power. As the national government begins to encroach on the political authority of the Buendías, the family must either embroil themselves in a national contest against the authority of the Conservative government or begin to view themselves as ghosts of an older and residual community history.

At the conclusion of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson says, "nations…have no clearly identifiable births, and their deaths, if they ever happen, are never natural" (205). If this opinion is illuminating, so is the corresponding footnote, which reads, "for such apocalypses the neologism 'genocide' was quite recently coined" (205). The significance of these statements is two-fold. First, the idea of the nation does not allow for the possibility of its death, and second, if it does die, it is only because everyone who shares and claims that national identity has also perished. If there are communities which can be said to live in death and die in life, they are the South of

Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and the Buendía family of García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Like Rilke's angels, the individuals of both communities do not seem to know whether it is the living they move amongst, or the dead.

Chapter 1: Between Class and Nation: History and Identity in *Absalom, Absalom!*

The South of William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* is a South in crisis. Set between 1909 and 1910, the novel follows Quentin Compson as he moves from his childhood home in Jefferson, Mississippi to his room at Harvard University. The bulk of the novel, however, focuses on the multi-decade saga of Thomas Sutpen and his family, which Quentin hears, tells, and becomes entangled in. This dual movement—from Jefferson to Harvard and from the present into the past—reflects Quentin's anxiety about his Southern identity, which only becomes more acute as he moves away from the South. Quentin's involuntary but increasingly compulsive investigation of the Sutpen story vividly demonstrates that identity is essentially a social and historical construct.

Two opposing worldviews complicate Quentin's understanding of the Sutpen story and his relationship to it. The first of these stresses the continuity of history and accepts the social divisions which separate North and South, black and white, rich and poor as eternal and unchanging. By reifying these divisions, it provides a stable base from which Southerners can articulate their identities. The second worldview emphasizes the rupture between the present and the past. It highlights the difference between imagined, narrative history and the chaotic, inexplicable progression of events in time. This worldview explains the disconnect Quentin feels from the antebellum Southern society with which he was taught to identify. As this situational understanding of history emerges in Quentin's thinking, it highlights the self-interested way in which the Southern elite have imagined the South's history to justify its highly stratified social and economic order.

For those who view the South's history as continuous and meaningful, two imagined communities structure historical memory: the imagined class of the Southern aristocracy, who see themselves as categorically elevated above the poor—black and white—and organized in history into family dynasties, and the South, a region with "national" aspirations and an inherited belief in white supremacy. These communities of class and nation depend upon the existence of a continuous history that can make the experience of their constituents intelligible across time. This notion of history as linear and objective is one that the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* work to enforce, but which is constantly threatened by other temporal models as the characters of the novel are excluded or alienated from their communities.

The superimposition of these two imagined communities in the minds of the Southern narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* is a direct result of the trauma of the Civil War. Before the war, the South is organized principally as a dynastic, rather than regional community. Poor whites are, at least theoretically, excluded from the Southern community with the same rigidity as poor blacks. It is only the Civil War which causes the expansion of the South's imagined community from a dynastic aristocracy into what Richard Godden calls "an independent slaveholding republic" (67). This new imagined community attempts to attach national legitimacy to the South's existing social order and defend it against the encroaching authority of the United States. In doing so, it denies the "class antagonism between slaveholding and non-slaveholding whites" (66). In their effort to create a continuous history of the imagined South, the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom*! erase this rupture, and their stories are strained by the overlapping but incongruent social divisions of the pre- and post- war South.

The systems of internal social division on which the Southern aristocracy depends developed in the antebellum South, before the South was imagined as a nation. Benedict Anderson explains that "nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations, transmitted from the origins of time through an endless sequence of loathsome copulations: outside history" (149). He continues, "the dreams of racism actually have their origin in ideologies of class, rather than in those of nation: above all in claims to divinity among rulers and to 'blue' or 'white' blood among aristocracies" (149). Many of the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* think in these pre-national terms about race and class even as they imagine the South as a nation. Carolyn Porter argues that "by linking the redneck with the master in the figure of a dynastic father, Faulkner's design also opened the opportunity to re-inscribe the racial hatred of the white underclass within the planter class that historically both fostered and depended on that hatred" (176).

Dynastic regimes often re-imagine themselves as nations, but the process must go unnoticed if the myth of historical continuity on which both orders depend is to go unchallenged. The South must imagine itself as a coherent, autonomous, and self-contained unit to shield its mythologies of class and race from the changing reality of the United States. Anderson asserts that "on the whole, racism and anti-Semitism manifest themselves, not across national boundaries, but within them… they justify not so much foreign wars as domestic repression and domination" (150). From this perspective, re-imagining the South as a nation helps to preserve the dynastic legitimacy of slavery and class oppression by making them "domestic" problems. The problem for Quentin and other southerners is that imagining the South as a nation requires severing and denying the historical links between the South and the rest of the United States. For Mr. Compson and Rosa Coldfield, there is no "American"

national identity; there are two nations, North and South, joined under the "high (and impossible) destiny of the United States" (*Absalom* 94). Quentin's understanding of himself hinges upon his ability, or inability, to escape this understanding of Southern history.

Both ways of imagining the South—as a class and as a nation—turn upon the logic of patrilineal inheritance. Porter correctly identifies in *Absalom, Absalom!* a "concerned interrogation of fatherhood as the enigmatic source and vehicle of social identity and political sovereignty" (170). Much of the analysis of the importance of fatherhood in *Absalom, Absalom!* focuses on Faulkner's depiction of Thomas Sutpen as a "dynastic father," which Porter defines as "a particular kind of father…who belongs to that tiny subset of all fathers in which we find the 'founders' of great families" (172). The father-son relationship is the structuring element which makes the history of the imagined dynastic community traceable and thus narratable. As the South re-conceptualizes itself as a nation, the father-son relationship does not lose its importance, it is simply translated into geographic terms. That is why Quentin is described as "born and bred" in the South.

The identification of father with son is the most powerful mechanism for denying the rupture between past and present and affirming the continuity of community history, but it depends upon the distinction between a son and a "legitimate" son. Porter argues that "the natural, physical domain in which conception and childbirth occur has little to do with the 'making' of fathers in the dynastic register of Sutpen's story," and that instead what makes a "dynastic father" is a son who can be "a recognized heir, legally capable of passing on that name to *his* son" (177, 172). This is true, to a point. Only a son who is eligible to share in the community in which his father imagines himself can be important to his dynastic

lineage. In an important sense, however, the biological links of fatherhood are used to justify the legitimacy of inheritance, so that illegitimate sons must not be considered sons at all. Thomas Sutpen does not recognize Charles Bon as a son, either legitimate or illegitimate, because the power of the father-son relationship to naturalize community history across time depends on the essential identification of father with son and son with father. The physical, genetic links belie the mutability of heritage, and the appearance of Charles Bon requires an defense of the legitimacy and exclusivity of the bond between father and legitimate son by Henry Sutpen and the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*.

The South's defeat in the Civil War, and thus the failure of its national ambitions, calls into question the validity of both its national and aristocratic mythologies. Because the historical narratives which define the South cannot anticipate or explain the death of the South as an autonomous political and social order, the Civil War becomes, in Philip Weinstein's words, "unnarratable, monstrous, possessed of a half-life still disorienting its twentieth-century narrators in 1909 and 1910" ("Cant" 360). Postwar Southerners still identify with a regional-national South, but this identification forces them to see themselves as ghosts of a nation whose history has already ended. Quentin is unable to reconcile his family heritage, which defines him as a Southerner and a member of the South's aristocracy, with his experience in the modern United States, whose own historical narrative denies the legitimacy of the South's claims to nationhood and dynastic privilege. He, like Mr. Compson and Rosa Coldfield, can only locate identity in communal history, but the history which is available to him is that of a nation and class that no longer exist. In choosing between his "suspended" present and a continuous vision of Southern

history, Quentin chooses between two types of spiritual suicide. To be Southern is to be a ghost, but to be anything else is to be nothing at all.

Part 1: Thomas Sutpen and the Quest for an Heir

Within the narrative frame of *Absalom, Absalom!*, which features several Southern narrators working to make sense of the disconnect between their own reality and the historical narrative of the South's, the Sutpen story represents a dramatization of the various myths—national and dynastic—by which Southerners seek to justify the South's social order and assert the historical continuity of their community. His narrative reveals the imaginative transformation caused by the Civil War, which compels Southern aristocrats, who originally conceive of their community and history in dynastic terms, to adopt the rhetoric of nationhood. Sutpen's design, conceived of in and largely confined to the antebellum South, is an effort to create meaning and identity within its dynastic social order. When the South does begin to imagine itself as a nation, the presumptions and rules which govern his design change. Sutpen's efforts to conceal his passage into the planting class from which his low birth should exclude him and to produce a son entitled to inherit his property according to the strictures of Southern society reflect the assumptions about time and history which govern Southern society and make it a source of spiritual meaning as well as economic control.

Section 1: The Perception of Time and the Dynastic Community of the Prewar South

The antebellum South of *Absalom, Absalom!* imagines itself as a dynastic aristocracy. As an aristocratic community, its society is largely organized by the

relationship of lord and tenant, master and slave. These eternal categories exist outside of the historical time of the imagined community whose historical narrative belongs to the aristocratic class, the lords and masters. Their historical relationship with one another is organized along dynastic, or familial, lines. Those outside the aristocracy are defined by their exclusion from, rather than than membership in, the South's imagined community. Thomas Sutpen, who is born in the wilderness of what will become West Virginia, only becomes aware of "time" when he is confronted with the stratified society of a Tidewater plantation. When he does, he embraces this thinking as a way of redeeming himself, his ancestors, and his progeny.

When Sutpen and his family emerge from the West Virginia wilderness, their existence is timeless and their movement resembles, in Walter Benjamin's terminology, "one single catastrophe" rather than "a chain of events" (257). Quentin describes the Sutpen clan "sliding back down out of the mountains and skating in a kind of acceleration and sloven and inert coherence" (*Absalom* 180-81). There is no sense of direction, of logical action, of progress. They experience "the world, rising about them and flowing past as if the cart moved on a treadmill" (182). That time passes is undeniable, but it does not do so in a perceivable or measurable way. The poor West Virginians, on the fringes of the South's cultural sphere, do not experience what Anderson calls "calendrical time". They travel, "it now spring and now summer and they still moving on toward a place they had never seen and had no conception of…from a place…back to which probably not one of them…could have led the way" (*Absalom* 182). The lack of a past to which they can return is directly related to their inability to conceive of the future towards which they are going. Without historical narratives to provide the framework for imagining the future, the Sutpen family only experiences a never-ending present.

The Sutpen family's movement is disconnected from any particular region, and thus any regional sense of communal identity. The same climatic symbols, which for Quentin are powerful reminders of the continuity of individual and communal identity, are completely divorced from their historical symbolism in the world of Sutpen's childhood. His family travels without "progressing parallel in time but descending perpendicularly through temperature and climate—a (you couldn't call it a period because as he remembered it or as he told Grandfather he did, it didn't have either a definite beginning or a definite ending. Maybe attenuation is better)—an attenuation" (*Absalom* 182). Place, which organizes the Southern aristocratic notion of history, is completely unrelated to time in the experience of the Sutpen family. In Quentin's mind, however, the two are inseparable. This is why he can say that the Sutpen family was "not progressing parallel in time." Their geographic relocation and the unimportance of historical time to their perception of themselves allowed them to "descend perpendicular" moving from the frontier of West Virginia into the Old South of the Tidewater. Such a movement would be impossible in the imagined-communal understanding of the Southern aristocracy, which sees the South as an internally static entity whose only movement is westward. The Sutpen's family's eastern movement is a dramatic enough break with Southern cultural myths that it resembles a movement backwards in time. This interpretation of the Sutpen family's journey, which Shreve and Quentin can understand because of the symbolically charged conceptions of place which pervade the imagined-community history of the South, is contrasted with Thomas Sutpen's own experience of the journey as something without "a definite beginning or a definite ending." The chaos of Sutpen's journey from the mountains can only be seen against the background of order that the Southern aristocracy's understanding of history imposes on the landscape.

The values and symbols that give meaning to the Southern aristocracy cannot be understood outside of historical time. Quentin reports that before Sutpen arrived in the Tidewater "it had never once occurred to him that any man should take any such blind accident as [wealth] as authority or warrant to look down at others" (*Absalom* 180). It is only the imagined community of class and the dynastic thinking that it allows that justify the continuing inequality of Southern society. Imagined-community history is used to disguise the "accident" which causes one person to be born rich and another poor. As a boy from the "uncivilized" mountains of West Virginia, Sutpen "didn't listen to the vague and cloudy tales of Tidewater splendor that penetrated even his mountains because then he could not understand what the people meant" (*Absalom* 180). Here, again, Sutpen sees the world as "a pile of debris" (Benjamin 258), essentially random and chaotic; "he just thought that some people were spawned in one place and some in another, some spawned rich…and some not" (*Absalom* 180). The "tales of Tidewater splendor" do not captivate Sutpen for several interrelated reasons. First, Sutpen cannot imagine the "Tidewater." The "tales" depend upon a symbolically charged geographic imagination. Sutpen does not conceive of his own community as one with defined borders or history, if he conceives of it at all, so he cannot imagine the history or geographic specificity of the Virginia Tidewater. Quentin, on the other hand, sees cultural significance in geographic borders. That is why the tales have to "penetrate" the mountains of West Virginia and why he refers to Sutpen's birthplace as "West Virginia," even though when Sutpen was born, it was still part of Virginia. Second, the "splendor" of the Tidewater depends on a valuation of material wealth which is inconceivable to the young Sutpen. He cannot bring himself to care about or imagine any wealth which lacks the immediacy and utility of the hunting rifle.

This view of the world, which places no blame on Sutpen's family for its socio-economic conditions, its subjugation to the vicissitudes of chance and fate, contrasts markedly with the view he has when he sees "his own father and sisters and brothers as the owner, the rich man (not the nigger) must have been seeing them all the time—as cattle, creatures heavy and without grace, brutely evacuated into a world without hope or purpose for them, who would in turn spawn with brutish and vicious prolixity, populate, double treble and compound" (*Absalom* 190). For the rich man, the catastrophe of existence is felt only in the absence of historical meaning, by the poor who live without "hope or purpose." He, the "owner," lumps the poor whites in with his other possessions, both slave and cattle. The poor receive no spiritual return for their labor in the aristocratic society of the South. Instead, they are the backdrop against which the history of the rich is enacted.

Section 2: The Origins of Aristocracy, Hiding Sutpen's Transition

Writing about the development of bourgeois thought in the decades after the French Revolution, Georg Lukacs asserts "the important bourgeois humanists of this period find themselves in a paradoxical situation: while they comprehend the necessity of revolutions in the past and see in them the foundation for all that is reasonable and worthy of affirmation in the present, nevertheless they interpret future development in terms of a henceforth peaceful evolution on the basis of these achievements" (29). Sutpen's design requires him to embrace a similarly paradoxical mindset. The legitimacy of the South, and thus its status as a source of transcendental meaning for its members, depends upon the supposedly immemorial origins of its aristocratic families, and thus its social divisions, so while Sutpen is empowered to conceive of his design by his newfound historical imagination, he must simultaneously transgress the South's social divisions and affirm their immutability to

appropriate the value of the South's historical narrative for himself. Alternatively, his narrators must portray his passage into the aristocratic class as an inexplicable aberration so as to leave the origin of their own wealth and privilege unexamined. His entry into the planting class is a revolutionary transgression, and it must be hidden to preserve the narrative which justifies the existence of the Southern aristocracy.

Sutpen begins to think historically when he realizes that "a man builds for his future…not only to the body which will be his tomorrow or next year, but towards actions and subsequent irrevocable courses of resultant action…which ten or twenty or thirty years from now he will take" (*Absalom* 196). This newfound sense of agency stands in stark contrast with his vision at the plantation door, where he sees his family "spawn…in vicious prolixity" without "hope or purpose" (190). Sutpen's ability to "build a future," to control his social standing, is what makes his family's condition contemptible. To be spiritually fulfilled by a historical imagination of the world, Sutpen must achieve his own "Tidewater splendor." That is why he decides that he "should need first of all and above all things money in considerable quantities and in the quite immediate future" (196). Only the rich can imagine a place for themselves in the South's historical narrative, so when Sutpen begins to think historically his first task is to become rich.

The historical narrative of the South is the only framework through which Sutpen can motivate and justify his existence, so he has no choice but to embrace the narrative even though it categorically excludes his family from history. He realizes that it "wouldn't do no good" to shoot the plantation owner (*Absalom* 190), that instead he "got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with" (192). As Carolyn Porter explains, the dynastic authority that the rich man represents is the only socially "legitimate authority" on which "to make a distinction between good

and harm" (184). To kill the rich man and reject his value system would leave Sutpen without a way of understanding the world. He must embrace the rich man's historical narrative even though it makes his poverty shameful.

The dependence of Sutpen's design on the imagined community of the South and the Southern planting class is evident in his efforts to make the slave-owning society of the South, and his place in it, eternal. Sutpen names his plantation Sutpen's Hundred, "as if it had been a King's grant in unbroken perpetuity from his great grandfather" (*Absalom* 10). He wants to elide his transition from the ahistorical chaos of poverty to the wealth of his "baronial splendor" (30) behind the illusion of a distinguished heritage. His appropriation of the South's cultural myths reveals them to be myth rather than reality, but they are so ingrained in the thinking of the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* that they are never fully rejected.

Sutpen's paradoxical position, which requires him to affirm the class divisions of Southern society even as he transgresses them, strains the narrative of Southern history. Porter points out that "Faulkner's portrayal of Sutpen's crisis, far from essentializing the father's authority as a function of 'the very nature of time,' traces its social formation as a function of patriarchy's own rule" (181). Through Sutpen's encounter at the door, Faulkner reveals what Walter Benjamin might call a "moment of danger." Walter Benjamin argues that "historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger…in every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it" (255). Sutpen's encounter reveals the workings of history, but his design and the persuasive force of the South's historical narrative depend on covering up this moment of danger, on overpowering it, on reestablishing the continuity of history.

The difficulty the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*, General Compson, and Sutpen himself experience narrating Sutpen's transition from plantation overseer to new husband in the West Indies reflects the importance of imagining the South's pre-war history as continuous and unbroken. As Quentin relays it, "the other, the getting from the fields into the barricaded house, seemed to have occurred with a sort of violent abrogation which must have been almost as short as his telling about it—a very condensation of time which was the gauge of its own violence" (*Absalom* 201). Sutpen tells it this way, or General Compson hears it this way, because the dynastic narrative of the antebellum South does not admit the possibility of transitions from one class to another. Time itself must be "abrogated" to allow the transgression of such eternal categories.

By highlighting its violent and inexplicable nature, the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* portray Sutpen's transition as the exception that proves the impermeability of the South's supposedly eternal class divisions. When relating his story to General Compson, Sutpen is forced to "start over again with at least some regard for cause and effect even if none for logical sequence and continuity" (*Absalom* 199). Sutpen's transition is discredited as unnarratable because it challenges the assumptions on which the Southern historical narrative is based. Quentin continues, explaining that Sutpen kept "telling it all over and still it was not absolutely clear—the how and the why he was there and what he was—since he was not talking about himself. He was telling a story" (199). Quentin and his father portray his transition as an aberration, as something unimaginable and historically implausible, because doing so protects the imagined community narrative from which they derive meaning.

Sutpen's lowly origins represent a threat to the Southern historical narrative because the class boundaries that organize Southern society must be eternal if they are

to be morally conscionable. It is only ruptures like Sutpen's encounter at the door and the South's defeat in the Civil War which challenge the legitimacy and morality of the South's social order. That is why Mr. Compson describes the Confederacy's defeat as "that day when the South would realise that it was now paying the price for having erected its economic edifice not on the rock of stern morality but on the shifting sands of opportunism and moral brigandage" (*Absalom* 209). Miss Coldfield and Mr. Compson repeatedly imagine Sutpen "with a handkerchief over his face and the two pistol barrels glinting beneath the candelabra of a steamboat's saloon, even if no worse" (33) because by denying the legitimacy of Sutpen's wealth, they can implicitly claim legitimacy for their own aristocratic privileges. In *Fictions of Labor*, Godden compares Sutpen to Jason Lycurgus I, "father or grandfather of General Compson, who in 1811 entered Yoknapatawpha in possession of 'a pair of fine pistols, one meagre saddle bag…[and] a stronghocked mare'" (53). The narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* fail to draw this comparison, which would destroy the illusion of their eternal and inherited social position. By choosing to omit the origin story of their own family, the Compson narrators reveal that the legitimacy of their dynastic community depends on the illusion of eternity.

Family history is the main vehicle for maintaining the illusion of the South's timeless class divisions. As Anderson explains, the legitimacy and sovereignty of imagined communities is understood as "an inheritance, and, *as an inheritance*, it [is] compelled to enter a genealogical series" (196, emphasis in the original). By establishing their family's social position as the result of an unbroken chain of rightful heirs, just as earlier aristocracies used blue blood to claim divinity (Anderson 149), the Southern narrators can differentiate themselves from the new 'blackguards' of the Mississippi. Rosa Coldfield illustrates the importance of family history to legitimacy

early in the novel when she says, "he would have wanted our father's (or any other reputable man's) signature on a note of hand because our father knew who his father was in Tennessee and who his grandfather had been in Virginia and our neighbors and the people we lived among knew we knew" (*Absalom* 11). The simple ability to trace his family history through time makes Mr. Coldfield a respectable man, and it is this legitimacy that Sutpen wants to appropriate and that his narrators wish to deny him. Rosa Coldfield is adamant that "marrying Ellen or marrying ten thousand Ellens could not have made" Sutpen a "gentleman (11), but when Sutpen returns to Jefferson a second time, he returns as a "public enemy" precisely because the town has realized "that he was getting it involved with himself" (33). Sutpen's passage into Jefferson's aristocracy reveals that the South's social divisions do not reflect "eternal categories." As a result, the line between legitimate and illegitimate wealth is blurred, and the historical narrative that justify the South's unequal economic structure become endangered.

Section 3: Genealogical Continuity and Imagined Futures in the Changing South

The emotional power of the South's historical narrative lies in its ability to connect "the dead and the yet unborn" (Anderson 11), and Sutpen's design depends as much on his ability to imagine a future for his family as it does on his ability to connect it to an immemorial past. Because historical thinking requires accepting the existing social order as natural and unchanging, Sutpen must create an heir who reflects the qualities that determine membership in the South's imagined community to derive meaning from the South's imagined community history. The myth of patriarchal inheritance that legitimizes the South's social order reduces the agency of women, both within Sutpen's design and in Southern society as a whole, while the South's transition from a dynastic to a national imagined community re-shapes

Sutpen's design by eliding the difference between rich and poor white. This re-imagining, however, cannot overcome the blow which the South's subjugation to the North deals to Sutpen's design, which depends on the continued existence of a coherent and autonomous South.

Sutpen's design is not an effort to stop the progress of time, but an effort to imagine a future organized by the same principles which govern the South's present social order. Because historical thinking, like literary realism, asserts that "the representational field of space and time…that its protagonist moves through corresponds to the objective world itself" (*Unknowing* 2), it necessarily excludes the possibility of other historical narratives, even ones which organize time in a similar fashion. Florence Dore argues that "in *Absalom, Absalom!* the impulse toward white purity is like the Agrarian call to retreat from progress" (239), but this "retreat from progress" is merely a retreat from "American progressivism," not an unwillingness or inability to imagine any future. She continues, "for Sutpen's dynasty to be white, he has to repeat himself rather than advance in time…Henry's whiteness indicates Sutpen's refusal not only of blackness, but of temporal continuation as well" (239). Historical thinking, however, does not see a contradiction between repetition and temporal progress. Rather, time is understood to proceed in a "superficial, unilinear, evolutionary way," so that repetition becomes the organizing principal of time (Lukacs 176). Sutpen's desire to repeat himself is a product of his efforts to imagine his family's future.

Perpetuating the South's imagined community is essential to giving transcendental importance to the continuous history of the Sutpen family. As soon as Sutpen understands the historical imagination that governs the South's social order, he feels he must "fix things right so that he would be able to look in the face not only of

the old dead ones but all the living ones that would come after him when he would be one of the dead" (*Absalom* 178). His historical thinking is paradoxical, but powerful. By imagining time as empty and continuous, he can build a future for himself, but he can also imagine the history of his descendants, to borrow Lukacs' words, as a "peaceful evolution on the basis of [his] achievements." This is why Sutpen "set out into a world…with a fixed goal in his mind…the vindication of a past affront in the person of a son whose seed is not yet, and would not be for years yet, planted" (*Absalom* 40). To derive meaning from the historical narrative of the South's ruling class, Sutpen must produce an heir who can act as the next link in the infinite chain of the Sutpen family.

Sutpen's design, like the rest of the South's historical narrative, depends on the temporal logic of patrilineal succession. Both minimize the importance and agency of women to emphasize the similarity between father and son, and thus the legitimacy of the son's inheritance of his father's place in the community. Porter cites "Sutpen's infamous 'proposal' to Rosa Coldfield" as an explicit recognition "that the woman's function under patriarchy really is, "to become a womb to bring forth men children" (193). This is true, but it should be stressed that the desired 'man child' must share the qualities which determine and guarantee membership in the South's imagined community. Sutpen rejects his first wife because he "found that she was not and could never be…adjunctive or incremental" to his design (*Absalom* 194). Conversely, Ellen is described as "that wife who would be adjunctive to the forwarding of that design" (*Absalom* 204). Oxford's English Dictionary defines "adjunct" as "a thing added to something else as a supplementary rather than an

essential part.”* Sutpen views his wives as supplementary rather than essential to his plan, but he must insure that they possess no qualities which would disqualify his male heir of his dynastic inheritance. As Sutpen transitions from Eulalia Bon to Ellen Coldfield, from Ellen to Rosa Coldfield, and from Rosa to Milly Jones, he becomes more explicit in his effort to attain a son who can insure the continuation of the family’s history through his participation in the imagined community of the South. The limited role Sutpen prescribes to women within his design reflects the patriarchal assumptions that are endemic to the historical narrative of the South as a whole. Both Mr. Compson and Rosa Coldfield deny or limit the individuality and agency of Ellen Coldfield as they describe her role in Sutpen’s design. Mr. Compson tells Quentin that after having children, “Ellen had now served her purpose, completed that bright pointless noon and afternoon of the butterfly’s summer and vanished” (*Absalom* 61). Later, Rosa Coldfield describes the Sutpen manor as “the house which he had built, which some suppuration of himself had created about him as the sweat of his body might have created, produced some (even if invisible) cocoon-like and complementary shell in which Ellen had had to live and die a stranger” (111). Ellen is cast both as a prisoner, impotent to assert her will, and a mask, holding only a formal and symbolic value.

The implications of the butterfly metaphor are made explicit by Mr. Compson when he uses it to describe Bon’s octoroon mistress, for whom “death or elopement or marriage” are the same thing, who changes “from phase to phase as the butterfly changes once the cocoon is cleared, carrying nothing of what was into what is, leaving nothing of what is behind but eliding complete and intact and unresisting into the next avatar as the overblown rose or magnolia elides from one rich June to the next,

* "Adjunct." Def. 1. Oxford Dictionaries. Oxford University Press, n.d. Web. 9 Nov. 2014.

leaving no bones, no substance, no dust" (*Absalom* 159). Sutpen does not place new limits on the articulation of female agency and identity, rather his story reveals the link between these limitations and the notion of patrilineal inheritance which legitimizes the South's historical narrative.

While racial purity remains an important component in determining the type of wife who can be 'adjunctive' to Sutpen's design, the Civil War forces the South to re-imagine itself as a nation, and in doing so, deny the supposedly essential difference between rich and poor white. This re-imagination is not entirely successful, and the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* retain many of the South's prewar biases, but it does change how Sutpen intends to perpetuate his family line. The impact of the South's re-imagination of itself on Sutpen's design is illustrated by Rosa Coldfield's 1909 description of Sutpen:

> "He was not articulated in this world. He was a walking shadow. He was the light-blinded bat-like image of his own torment cast by the fierce demoniac lantern up from beneath the earth's crust and hence in retrograde, reverse; from abysmal and chaotic dark to eternal and abysmal dark completing his descending (do you mark the gradation?) ellipsis, clinging, trying to cling with vain unsubstantial hands to what he hoped would hold him, save him, arrest him—Ellen…myself, then last of all that fatherless daughter of Wash Jones' only child" (*Absalom* 139).

Sutpen's design, founded as it is upon the same principles which denied any privilege or purpose to his childhood family is an "image of his own torment cast…in retrograde, reverse." When the South loses the Civil War, he moves from the "abysmal and chaotic dark" of poverty to the "eternal and abysmal dark" of the fallen

Confederacy, whose history has ended but which continues to define Southern society. Sutpen emerges from darkness late in the history of the South, arriving at his apogee just as the South is destroyed, and he completes "his descending…ellipsis, clinging…to…that fatherless daughter of Wash Jones' only child" after the South has re-imagined itself as a nation and the class distinction that caused him to conceive of his design no longer represents an obstacle to historical meaning.

The impact of the Civil War on Sutpen's design is twofold. First, it re-shapes the imagined community of the South to deny the divide between rich and poor whites. As Godden explains, "tenant and planter, upcountry yeoman and Black Belt lord elide" in the new "Confederate utopianism" of the South (66-67). Wash Jones, the white trash squatter who lives on Sutpen's Hundred, "who before '61 had not even been allowed to approach the front of the house" now "entered the house itself" (*Absalom* 149). This, new national vision is reflected in Wash Jones' daydream, when he watches "the proud galloping image merge and pass, galloping through avatars which marked the accumulation of years, time, to the fine climax where it galloped without weariness or progress, forever and forever immortal beneath the brandished sabre and the shot-torn flags rushing down a sky in color like thunder" (231). It is only because the national community of the South makes no distinction in historical status between rich and poor white that Sutpen can imagine producing an heir with Milly Jones, "the fatherless daughter of Wash Jones' only child."

The significance of this re-evaluation is demonstrated by Sutpen's 1863 admission to General Compson that "the boy-symbol was just the figment of the amazed and desperate child, that now he would take that boy in…so that that boy….could shut that door himself forever behind him…and look ahead along the still undivulged light rays in which his descendants…waited to be born" (*Absalom*

210). Sutpen, who was turned away from the plantation door because of his class, no longer considers such exclusion necessary to imagine history. Sutpen still needs an heir and the legitimacy of an imagined community to give himself a place in history, but the South's conflict against the Northern narrative of historical progress changes the conditions under which the future of the Sutpen family is imagined by re-shaping the South into its own nation, autonomous and eternal in design if not in reality.

The second impact of the Civil War is the limit it poses on the imaginable future of the South. Sutpen's design, like the spiritual fulfillment of all Southerners, depends upon the unhindered continuation of Southern society into the future, but the end of the Confederacy puts an end to the South's historical narratives, both aristocratic and national. After the Civil War, Sutpen clings to his memory of the antebellum South, hoping to create, as he did the first time, an eternal history out of timelessness. He refuses to join the Ku Klux Klan because he believes that "if every man in the South would do as he himself was doing, would see to the restoration of his own land, the general land and South would save itself" (*Absalom* 130). Sutpen, unlike the narrators of his story, is unwilling to resign himself to a life after history. Remembering her brief and unscrupulous courtship, Rosa imagines telling Sutpen, "I hold no substance that will fit your dream but I can give you airy space and scope for your delirium" (136). The past and future continuity of the South is predicated upon its living reality, so Sutpen's design becomes mere delirium after the South's defeat in the Civil War.

Within the larger narrative frame of *Absalom, Absalom!*, the story of Sutpen's design reveals that historical thinking is a function of the South's social order, which

imagines itself first as an aristocracy and later as a nation to legitimize the social divisions that organize its society and provide spiritual fulfillment to its ruling class. To redeem himself historically, Sutpen strives to become a member of the ruling class while affirming the eternal division between rich and poor white. The narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* portray this transgression of class boundaries as an inexplicable aberration from the norm because it threatens the legitimacy and moral permissibility of the South's economic system. Just as Sutpen attaches himself to an immemorial past to join the South's dynastic class, he must imagine a future for his family within the South's imagined community to derive spiritual validation from his place within the unending and continuous history of the South. Sutpen and his narrators assert the similarity between father and son to justify the system patrilineal inheritance that orders the South's historical narrative. When the South is forced to re-imagine itself as a nation by the stresses of the Civil War, the qualities that a legitimate heir must replicate to remain a member of the South's ruling class are changed and the original class division between rich and poor whites is suppressed. After the Civil War, Sutpen's design fails not because of his lowly origins, which are no longer an obstacle to membership in the South's imagined community, but because he fails both to produce a white male heir and to build a viable future for the postwar South.

Part 2: Charles Bon—Orphan and Brother

Much like Sutpen's design, Charles Bon's search for his father's recognition represents a search for historical meaning. But where the story of Sutpen's design reveals the barriers and limits that the Southern narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* must inforce to maintain the illusion of community continuity, Quentin and Shreve use

Bon's story to examine the existential cost of exclusion from such a community. Their suppositions about Bon's thoughts and feelings reflect their own anxieties about such exclusion as much as those of Bon himself. In their account of his life and death, Charles Bon's marginalization from the dynastic community of the antebellum South renders him unable to articulate his place in history or find the motivation to live.

Of all the characters in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Bon is the least knowable. Whatever doubts we have about Miss Coldfield and Mr. Compson's reliability as narrators when they speak about Thomas Sutpen's character and motivations, they pale in comparison to the epistemological problem that Charles Bon presents. No narrator in *Absalom, Absalom!* has ever met Bon, nor have they spoken about him with someone who did know him. In this sense, whatever motivations or desires are inscribed upon Charles Bon must be read as an attempt to make sense of his actions or existence in terms of the threat he represents to the cultural myths of Southern society or his resultant exclusion from that society. Quentin highlights the speculative quality of every discussion of Bon and his motivations when he tells Shreve that "nobody ever did know if Bon ever knew Sutpen was his father or not, whether he was trying to revenge his mother or not at first and only later fell in love, only later succumbed to the current of retribution and fatality which Miss Rosa said Sutpen had started and had doomed all his blood to" (*Absalom* 216). Each of Bon's possible motivations that Quentin lists tells the reader more about how Quentin and the other narrators explain their community and its relation to the past than it does about Bon himself. The fatalist bent in their rhetoric makes sense for people whose identities are cast in the terms of a Southern culture that has ceased to exist, which has no future, but whose validity and historical reality is largely unquestioned by its surviving members.

Just as the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate sons protects the legitimacy of the dynastic community of the Old South, the absence of a father figure prevents Bon from justifying his actions. When Shreve imagines Bon defending his morganatic marriage to his mother, Bon does not need to say, "I have been born into this world with so few fathers that I have too many brothers to outrage and shame while alive and hence too many descendants to bequeath my little portion of hurt and harm to" (*Absalom* 247) because it is understood. Without any father, without any heritage or group identity, it is impossible to make a historical claim to any rights or privileges without incurring the "outrage and shame" of the rest of humanity. Like Sutpen, Bon cannot reject the South's historical narrative without losing the ability to distinguish between good and harm. Unlike Sutpen, Bon is prevented from successfully concealing his blackness, which disqualifies him from the South's imagined community.

Bon's inability locate himself within a sequence of patrilineal inheritance prevents him from organizing history in a fulfilling way, but it does not prevent him from experiencing time as historical. For Shreve's Bon, "no man had a father, no one personal Porto Rico or Haiti, but all mother faces which ever bred swooping down at those almost calculable moments out of some obscure ancient general affronting and outraging which the actual living articulate meat had not even suffered but merely inherited" (*Absalom* 239-240). The "calculable moments" of the mother, the "ancient" and "inherited" quality of the affronting, and the remembered, impersonal "Porto Rico or Haiti" indicate the importance of time and history to Bon's view of the world. Aware of the past, but unable to derive meaning from it, Bon's narrative is the inverse image of the one which sustains the Southern aristocracy. Shreve describes Bon's early childhood as one marked by a generalized sense of orphanhood, where "all boy

flesh that walked and breathed stemming from that one ambiguous eluded dark fatherhead and so brothered perennial and ubiquitous everywhere under the sun" (*Absalom* 240). Fatherhood and brotherhood are proposed as alternative ways of imagining and organizing society. The relationship of father to son is vertical, it moves through history, and it legitimizes the son's inheritance of the father's wealth in an otherwise eternal social order. Alternatively, brotherhood does not depend on a historical imagination; it emphasizes a simultaneity of experience and suggests an equality of privileges. When fatherhood restricts social standing to a select few, brotherhood dilutes them. Bon poses the dual threat of miscegenation and incest because to recognize the black man as his brother threatens the legitimacy of the entire social order on which Henry Sutpen's wealth is based. To mix eternal categories is to recognize the essential fraternity of all people and reveal the "moral brigandage" which the South's historical narratives are designed to deny.

After Sutpen fails to acknowledge Bon for a final time, Shreve and Quentin find Bon's motivation in a lack of all motivation, in his apathy and cynical fatalism. Shreve says, "since both of the two people who could have given him a father had declined to do it, nothing mattered to him now, revenge or love or all, since he knew now that revenge could not compensate him nor love assuage" (*Absalom* 274). Love and revenge only matter in the context or history and identity. Without a father to accept him and give him a place in history, Bon cannot connect his actions to any identity, he cannot produce a coherent reason for being. Nothing can "compensate" or "assuage" because there is no individual to be harmed.

The implications of the competing forces of brotherhood and fatherhood are made obvious by Charles Bon. The aristocratic Southern concept of inheritance excludes him from the ruling class, but it also excludes him from the narratives which

Southerners use to understand themselves and their history. Being part of the continuum of history is essential to constructing identity. The myth of fatherhood is used to naturalize and regulate access to that continuum. Conversely, brotherhood, which works to expand community, is deemphasized because each new brother who is recognized is owed a part of the son's inheritance. The idea of the brotherhood of contemporaries in inimical to the legitimacy of all historically imagined communities, and it is depicted as a troubled and unfulfilling notion by the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*, all of whom base their identities in the historical narratives of their communities.

Part 3: Quentin Compson—Continuity vs. Rupture

Although the narrative present of *Absalom, Absalom*! often fades into the background of the novel, the period between August 1909 and January 1910 represents a critical moment in Quentin Compson's life. He has not yet succumbed completely to the neurotic determinism that characterizes his section of *The Sound and the Fury.* Instead, he has the opportunity to escape the malaise of the South and integrate into the modern society of the North, but the transition demands that he abandon the Southern narratives of history which explain and justify the social structure of his community and, through them, his own identity. This tension gives rise to his simultaneous identification with his father, Mr. Compson, and his roommate Shreve McCannon. Quentin's inability to shed his connections with the past highlights the indelible link that exists in the minds of Southerners between the South's history and the idea of the South as a nation, so that Quentin cannot identify as an American without rejecting his Southern heritage. Without the means to

connect his present to the history of his community, Quentin is unable to imagine a productive or meaningful future for himself. It is this imaginative failure which prevents Quentin's economic assimilation from becoming a social or spiritual one.

Section 1: History and Identity

As Quentin narrates the Sutpen story, he begins to discover that it is not just the content of a story which is passed from generation to generation, but also its form. Quentin's seemingly inevitable repetition of Mr. Compson's narrative style leads Quentin to speculate on the nature of history. He realizes that he is trapped in a mode of narration that obscures his sense of alienation from Southern society by assuming a connection between the present and the past.

In Part Seven, after Shreve interrupts Quentin to tell him that it is not "just me that sounds like your old man," Quentin thinks:

> "*Maybe we are both father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished, Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space, to the old ineradicable rhythm.*" (*Absalom* 210)

This passage encapsulates the problems of history, community, and identity that Quentin experiences. The tension between the "ripples" on the water, "the unchanging

sky," and the "different temperature" of the pools reflect the overlapping and contradictory way in which Quentin relates to and is defined by the past.

Quentin senses or suspects that there is a difference between his reality, his historical moment, and those of the past, but these differences do not alter the essence of history. Each pool has a "different molecularity of having seen, felt, [and] remembered," but "it doesn't matter." His historical moment may "reflect in a different tone the infinite, unchanging sky" but it cannot alter the "old ineradicable rhythm" of "the pebble's watery echo" any more than it can alter the unchanging sky itself. This alienation from the flow of history is a problem for Quentin, who sees himself both in the different molecularity of the pond and in the sameness of the ripple, which passes through "a narrow umbilical water-cord" from one historical moment to the next. Each moment is defined by what it inherited from the last, by what is continuous, rather than be what is new or unprecedented. The "ineradicable rhythm" trumps the "different molecularity." Quentin's fatalistic belief that "nothing happens once and is over" is tempered only by the oppressive uncertainty that the repetition of "maybe" evokes. Quentin does not propose this version of history because it is satisfying, but because it is the only one he can imagine.

Quentin's double identification with Shreve and his father simultaneously creates a tension between his notions of community and his notions of history. Quentin's connection to Shreve is two-fold. First, they are both unable to narrate Southern history except through inherited narratives which they either imitate or caricature. Either way, they are unable to develop a truly new understanding of the "South," separate from existing historical narratives. Second, they are contemporaries, "the heart and blood of youth" (*Absalom* 236). Shreve is part of the same pond, the same molecularity, as Quentin. Quentin's "brotherhood" with Shreve is complicated

and problematic. Their cultural differences are emphasized as often as their comradery and complicity. Their stakes in the Sutpen story appear very different. The ambiguous association of the two, who are "both more and less than twins" (*Absalom* 236), parallels other complicated notions of brotherhood, ones that often run at cross purposes to the ideas of heritage and descent which many of the characters of the novel, Quentin and Shreve included, seem to hold.

The stylistic similarity between Quentin and his father is matched by other more natural and unquestioned associations between the two that pervade Quentin's metaphor. These associations reinforce the imagined community narrative of Southern history. Quentin's pond is connected to the past by a "narrow umbilical water-cord" (*Absalom* 210). For all their differences, the previous pond continuously gives birth to the current one. Even when Quentin works hardest to illustrate the separation between the past and the present, he cannot help but rely on metaphors of inheritance. Similarly, Quentin's belief in an "ineradicable rhythm" which preserves the "original ripple-space" prioritizes a vertical, historical, explanation over a horizontal, specific, one. His brotherhood with Shreve "doesn't matter." What matters is the "watery echo" of which he and his father are a part.

Shreve's connection with Mr. Compson is more difficult to understand. Quentin's metaphor does not seem to explain it. Is Shreve part of the same watery echo which rules and determines the lives of Quentin and Mr. Compson? If so, of what is it a watery echo? What is symbolized by the falling pebble? It would make sense for the pebble to represent the events of the Sutpen story. That is, after all, the story that they unavoidably continue to tell in the style of Mr. Compson. If the pebble is the unseen origin of the South, then Quentin's line of thinking flows naturally from "maybe we are both Father" to "maybe happen is never once" (*Absalom* 210). The

simultaneous conflation of his own identity with those of Shreve and Mr. Compson complicates the metaphor, however. The causal connections between Quentin and Mr. Compson, and between both of them and Thomas Sutpen, are much more easily linked to the analogy of the ripple than the connection between these three and Shreve.

Quentin is sure of an affinity between father, son and Shreve, but he cannot quite explain its causes. Even after his ripple metaphor, as he concludes "yes, we are both Father," he leaves open the possibility for other constellations of association, thinking, "Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all us" (*Absalom* 210). These overlapping and reversible lines of association between the four figures are much more accurate, even if they are more convoluted. The causal links of history and heritage which connect Quentin to his father and Thomas Sutpen move in one direction and the narrative process of history works in the other. Quentin and Shreve "make" Mr. Compson and Thomas Sutpen as they narrate their stories. Mr. Compson and Sutpen "make" Quentin and Shreve by providing the raw materials—physically in the case of Quentin and narratively in both cases—for the stories by which they define themselves. Shreve, who is a willing spectator of Southern theatre, can only take this role because the South clings to its own version of history long after the Northern narrative of unification has become culturally dominant. Quentin and Mr. Compson "make Shreve" by providing the source from which he draws his caricature of the South. Shreve, conversely, "makes" the Southerners by affirming Quentin's Southern identity even as it amuses him. The overriding implication of this section, however, is that Quentin is less sure than ever about how to structure, imagine, or explain his relationship to the past and present. He

is aware that the "ripple-space" of imagined-community history is insufficient to explain his web of relationships, but he cannot articulate a more comprehensive way of viewing the world.

This dynamic and unstable system of creation contrasts with the "infinite, unchanging sky" which the various pools of water reflect. This image suggests that some eternal truth is reflected in each historical moment, however distinct those reflections may be. The assumption that some truths about human existence remain constant and unaltered by the passage of time is problematic. Many of the cultural narratives which Quentin inherits from his community and which he uses to explain that community and his part in it seem to belong to this category of truths. Quentin recognizes the changing reality of the South, but he does not recognize the full extent to which that change has thrown into question many of the community narratives that Southerners and Northerners alike depend upon to understand themselves and their communities.

The interconnectedness of community identity and individual identity is hidden and naturalized where everyone belongs to the same community. It is only on the fringes, where communities interact with one another, that cultural myths must be rearticulated and defended. This is what leads Quentin to think, "I shall have to never listen to anything else but this [the Sutpen Story] again forever so apparently not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do" (*Absalom* 222). Part of Quentin's problem is his self-absorption. Quentin's Southern identity comes into dialogue with Shreve's "northern" perspective, but it is only Quentin's identity which is interrogated. Shreve is also a foreigner in the American "North," but Quentin seems oddly unable to distinguish between Shreve's Canadian "north" and the amorphous "North" which stands in opposition to his "South."

Clearly, one of the reasons for this unequal exchange is that the Northern and Southern narratives of American history are mutually exclusive. The North sees the United States as the natural culmination of American history, while the South must believe in its own historical and cultural autonomy to justify its particular system of social stratification.

Section 2: The Myths of Community Continuity

From the outset of the novel there is a tension between the historically specific moment in which the story of Sutpen and Charles Bon is narrated and the imagined-communal notion of history which gives the story significance to its listeners and narrators. Before the novel begins, Quentin already knows most of the story because "it was part of his twenty years' heritage of breathing the same air and hearing his father talk about the man, a part of the town's—Jefferson's—eighty years' heritage of the same air which the man himself had breathed between this September afternoon in 1909 and that Sunday morning in June in 1833" (*Absalom* 7). Faulkner emphasizes the duality to the bond between Quentin and Sutpen by distinguishing Quentin's personal twenty year heritage from the town's eighty year heritage. For Quentin to identify with the Sutpen story, a two-step process must occur: Quentin must identify with the town and the town must identify with its past. Quentin must imagine his identification with the town to be part of his "heritage". The contemporary town, in turn, must imagine itself to be the same town where Sutpen lived and died for his story to be relevant to its heritage. "Heritage" always involves this double identification. For personal identity to be situated in history, communities must be imagined which can bridge the gap between the individual and the course of human events.

In suggesting the duality of this bond, Faulkner highlights the way in which imagined-community history elides the situational relationship of past and present. "Heritage" becomes the "narrow umbilical cord" through which a continuous community history can be asserted. Faulkner, however, leaves open the possibility of reading imagined-community narratives as a situational response to the disconnect between the present and the past by distinguishing between Quentin's personal heritage and the town's communal heritage. Quentin's "twenty year heritage," places the Sutpen story in the context of Quentin's historical moment. He knows the Sutpen story because it is relevant to how the South understands itself in 1909, not simply because he and Sutpen form part of the same community. Part of Quentin's personal "heritage" is the idea of community and community history.

The dualism of individual and community "heritage" is reinforced by the repeated and changing significance of "air" in the passage. Faulkner repeats the phrase "same air," first in the context of Quentin's twenty-year heritage, then in the context of Jefferson's eighty-year heritage. Quentin's sense of history is predicated upon his geographic rootedness. If he had not been "breathing the same air" for twenty years, he would not have inherited the Sutpen story as part of his historical understanding of his self. The importance of the Sutpen story to his community depends, in turn, on the belief that Jefferson continues to be filled with "the same air which the man himself had breathed." Jefferson as an entity must remain essentially unchanged even as its constituent members die and are replaced.

The overlap between Quentin's personal heritage and the town's heritage is dynamic, but the specificity of his experience of the South is often hidden by the illusion of cultural and historical continuity. When the distance between the two types of heritage is revealed, it threatens his faith in the second, communal type of heritage.

Faulkner's decision to make air the unifying symbol of community and history underscores the instability of this vision of the world. Climatic reifications of community pervade *Absalom, Absalom!*, but they are undercut by Faulkner's description of the "Continental Trough" which unites Shreve's Canada with Quentin's Mississippi. The air which Quentin breathes is not the same air which Sutpen breathed, though the essentially unchanged climate of the South makes it seem so. In reality, the air which Quentin breaths is more likely to be that which Shreve has breathed, connected as they are by "that River…which is very Environment itself which laughs at degrees of latitude and temperature" (*Absalom* 208). Latitude and temperature are used to distinguish between regional communities, but air and water undermine this system of imagined geographic divisions. The circulation of air, hidden behind climatic distinctions, points to the importance of the historical moment, to the interrelation of the world's economic system, while the climatic illusion suggests that communities like Jefferson are essentially self-contained.

Section 3: Ghosts of the Old South

Quentin's sense of self depends upon a complex set of community narratives which bind his identity to a society which no longer exists. The tension between Quentin's inherited belief in the continuity of history and the obvious disconnect between the South's past and present causes Quentin, like the other Southern narrators, to associate the defeat of the Confederacy with the end of history. Immediately after the reader learns that Quentin already knows the Sutpen story because it is part of his "heritage," Faulkner writes that Quentin's "very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous, defeated names" (*Absalom* 7). The regional specificity of these narratives is emphasized in the next clause, which explains that Quentin "was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth" (7). Quentin's

personal "identity," if he has one, is an amalgamation and re-articulation of Southern historical narratives. These narratives, detached from any living political or social order, cause Quentin and the other Southern narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* to imagine themselves as ghosts.

Faulkner ends the section on Quentin's heritage by describing the ghosts who fill the "empty hall" of his body. They look "with stubborn recalcitrance backward beyond the fever [of the Civil War] and into the disease with actual regret, weak from the fever yet free of the disease and not even aware that the freedom was that of impotence" (*Absalom* 7). It is easy to presume that the "disease" is slavery, but the South's disease is more totalizing. The ghosts do not look back "at" the disease, but "into" it. The disease is not just the institution of slavery, but the entire cultural imagination of the South which grew up to justify it. "Freedom from the disease" is the "freedom of impotence" because while the South's diseased historical narrative regulated the behavior and thought of its aristocracy, it also gave them myths by which to justify their actions. Without the disease, the sons of Southern aristocrats lack a coherent system for rationalizing their world. They are free because the dominant narrative of the South's ruling class has been overthrown, but impotent because without such a narrative, they cannot understand their own existence or motivations.

Many of the Southern narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* cope with the disconnect between the imagined-community history of the South and its present condition by imagining themselves as "ghosts" of the Old South. Rather than seeing the rupture between the present and the past as proof that history is not a continuous and orderly movement from the past into the future, they choose to imagine that history has ended, that they are outside of time, looking back on a world that once had

meaning and structure. As the logic of the quote suggests, the "stubborn back-looking ghosts" who fill Quentin are not the Confederate dead, but modern Southerners living in the shadow of the defeated Confederacy.

Mr. Compson and Rosa Coldfield's narrative techniques reflect this fatalistic self-imagining. Mr. Compson often highlights the emotional and psychological implausibility of the Sutpen story, but he blames this on the senselessness of the ahistorical present rather than on the inadequacy of imagined-community history as a basis for self-understanding. He tells Quentin, "We see dimly people, the people in whose living blood and seed we ourselves lay dormant and waiting, in this shadowy attenuation of time possessing now heroic proportions, performing their acts of simple passion and simple violence, impervious to time and inexplicable" (*Absalom* 80). According to Mr. Compson, their proportions are "now heroic" rather than simply "heroic" because of the "attenuation of time." Attenuation suggests the gradual loss of intensity or the process of "tapering gradually to a long slender point."[*] In this case, it is time itself which has slowed down, which has brought an end to history and left Quentin and Mr. Compson looking back at figures with "heroic proportion." For Mr. Compson, time has two registers: the present time, to which the figures of the Sutpen story are "impervious," and the time of history, which has come to an end or "attenuated" to the point of imperceptibility. Mr. Compson sees these two times as distinct and attributes the failings of the South's imagined-community history to the end of history rather than to the inherently artificial construction of historical community narrative.

[*] "Attentuate." Def. 2. Merriam-Webster. Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d. Web. 08 Nov. 2014.

The narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* live with a profound sense of fatalism, but they draw warmth from the idea that a more fulfilling life was not categorically denied to their forefathers. This is why Mr. Compson makes the contradictory assertion that he and Quentin "lay dormant and waiting" in these earlier people. He simultaneously embraces and rejects the continuum of history. He and Quentin turn to the past to make sense of their identities because they cannot make sense of their present. They strive to construct a coherent and believable narrative for the Sutpen story so they can sustain the myth that humans, or at least Southerners, can have coherent identities, that individuals can have purpose.

The contrast between the living reality of the South and the historical "death" of the South is reflected by the tension between the style of historical narration employed by Mr. Compson and Ms. Coldfield and Quentin's anxious efforts to understand his present. In "The End of Innocence," Lois Zamora's comparative study of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Zamora describes Mr. Compson and Ms. Coldfield's narration as "apocalyptic." She asserts that the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* rely on "a comprehensive temporal perspective from which [they] view the beginnings and ends of the worlds they remember and describe" (24). While it is true that the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* "seem to stand outside of time…surveying the story of an entire civilization from an atemporal point beyond its end" (27), it is equally true that this narrative technique is constantly undermined by the South's continued movement through and experience of time. As Sartre explains, even "a barred future is a future" (232). Tellingly, Zamora points to the Book of Revelation as "the most complete and finest example of apocalyptic writing" ("End" 25). It was "addressed to early Christians at a time of terrible political persecution" as an attempt "to make sense of the suffering of God's chosen people

by…ascribing teleological significance to events" (25). Even as she notes that in *Absalom, Absalom!* "there is no reward—only retribution—at time's end" (29), she fails to distinguish between the position of Saint John's readers and the position of those listening to the Sutpen narrative. Saint John may have spoken from outside of time, but he was speaking to readers who were very much in time, before the apocalyptic end which he foresaw. Alternatively, Quentin, the principle listener of the Sutpen story, is himself positioned beyond the end of the South's imagined-community history. None of his actions or experiences can draw "teleological significance" from the apocalyptic narration of the South.

The full failure of this apocalyptic narrative is only felt when it is contrasted with the very real, even if monstrous and inexplicable, future which Quentin faces in his transition to Harvard. Zamora asserts that "if Quentin's desperate need to understand and communicate Sutpen's history might *seem* to make him a successor to that history, such a succession is only semblance, for we know that within six months Quentin will drown himself in the Charles River" ("End" 30). It is only if we read Quentin's suicide through the fatalism of the South's historical narrative that the Southern apocalypse becomes complete. Faulkner does not argue that the South has no possible future, but that the South imagines itself without any possible future. All of its prophecies are self-fulfilling. The fact that "Shreve, the Northerner…is granted a future which promises continuance" ("End"30) reinforces the link between imagined community and historical imagination. It is only because Quentin cannot realign Southern history with American history that he is doomed to share his predecessors' spiritual death.

Section 4: Quentin in the Moment of Danger. The (Im)possibility of New Identity

Faulkner establishes Quentin's internal division early in the novel. Part of him is already distanced from the residual cultural imagination of the South, which is ill-suited to justify or give meaning to the lives of post-war Southerners. This is "the Quentin Compson preparing for Harvard in the South, the deep South dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts" (*Absalom* 4).The problem is that there is no "history," no narrative to naturalize or explain Southern participation in the Northern economy. As Quentin moves to the North, he loses access to whatever explanatory power Southern history still has. The Quentin going to Harvard is contrasted with another, "the Quentin Compson who was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost but nevertheless having to be one for all that, since he was born and bred in the deep South" (*Absalom* 4). Quentin's economic position is infinitely superior to most in the South, but he is still its cultural child. Even here, the connection between family and culture is clear. Quentin is a ghost because of how he was "born and bred." His identity is historical; it cannot be liquidated and re-purposed as easily as the wealth which it is used to justify. This slippage between justification and reality is the central problem of the South's ruling class. Quentin recognizes the impotence of the South's cultural mythology to give meaning to the current conditions of those living in the South, but he is unable to distance himself from his imagined community of country and class without losing his sense of self.

Miss Coldfield sums up the scant economic opportunity offered by the South in her first meeting with Quentin, saying, "I don't imagine you will ever come back here…since Northern people have already seen to it that there is little left in the South for a young man" (*Absalom* 5). Here, Miss Coldfield denies the South's role in its own destruction, blaming its current situation entirely on "Northern people." The

implication is that without the intervention of the North, it would have been possible for the South to continue existing as it had before the Civil War. Her thinking does not question the South's historical narrative, even though it can no longer fulfill the people who believe it. Quentin's decision to move north reflects an economic pragmatism rather than a cultural acceptance of the re-integration of Northern and Southern societies.

At the same time, Miss Coldfield highlights the devaluation and commodification of Southern identity. She tells Quentin, "maybe you will enter the literary profession as so many Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen too are doing now and maybe someday you will remember this and write about it. You will be married then I expect and perhaps your wife will want a new gown or a new chair for the house and you can write this and submit it to the magazines" (*Absalom* 5). Quentin can create a future for himself by commodifying and fictionalizing the South's historical narratives. His participation in the Northern economy—via his literary "profession"— is related to his ability to reproduce—as a writer, he "will be married." The failure of this future is directly related to Quentin's inability to construct a new identity which would allow him to distance himself from his Southern past.

Once Quentin arrives at Harvard, the tenuousness of his position becomes clearer. Quentin's liminal state—which connects him both to his fellow students, like Shreve, and to his Southern heritage—is untenable because both ways of understanding himself deny the legitimacy and possibility of the other. In Part Six, Quentin remembers other Harvard students asking him to, "Tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all" (*Absalom* 142). These questions suggest the problems that face Quentin as he

tries to integrate, or at least participate, in Northern society. Quentin's classmates are unable to accept Quentin as a Southerner and a peer at the same time, and Quentin is unable to perceive their curiosity as anything other than assault on his source of meaning and identity.

These questions, as Quentin imagines them, treat the South as a curiosity. They are callous in their incomprehension of the South and they seem to assume that Quentin has enough emotional distance to be unfazed by them. The other students do not ask Quentin, "What do *you* do there?" but, "What do *they* do there?" For all his Southern qualities, they imagine Quentin as someone who has already escaped the South. Like Shreve, they believe they can joke with Quentin about "Southern Bayards and Guineveres" without threatening his sense of self. They want Quentin to tell them stories about the South as if the Southern society was something he had witnessed rather than something through which he understood himself. His very presence in the North is seen as an act of disownment which makes the South an acceptable object of intellectual curiosity.

Quentin's continued uncertainty about the relationship of the past to the present, about meaning and identity, is reflected in his memory of these questions. They end with periods, not question marks. Quentin has no responses, but he is constantly faced with the task of explaining the existence of the South to himself and others. The voyeuristic incomprehension of Quentin's classmates is presented in aggregate, as it is experienced and remembered by Quentin. Quentin feels most Southern when he is in the North, where he feels that he has to account for being Southern. The answers of Rosa Coldfield and Mr. Compson, the illusion that history has ended, cannot hold up in the North, which has experienced neither the economic decay nor the cultural ghosting of the South.

Moreover, the reader does not know to what extent these questions have been altered by Quentin's perception of them and of himself. The questions proceed from innocent curiosity to callous confrontation, and it is possible, even likely, that the later questions are more inventions of Quentin's mind than accurately reported speech. If so, they reveal the latent insecurities which the friendly questions of Northerners have aggravated in Quentin. "Telling about the South" would require him to articulate his relationship to it, either to defend the South and his identity as a Southerner or to renounce it and, with it, his past, his family and his identity.

Seven years before the publication of *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), the Quentin Compson of *The Sound and The Fury* mused, "Mississippi or Massachusetts. I was. I am not. Massachusetts or Mississippi" (174). In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner has recreated the emotional and spiritual struggle that led Quentin to those fateful words. Confronted by the mutual exclusivity of Southern and Northern historical narratives, Quentin is caught between his Southern identity, which offers him no imaginable future, and his sense of alienation in the North, which gives him no alternative narrative with which to make sense of his place in the world. Quentin's future depends upon his ability to assimilate into Northern society, but the Southern historical narratives with which he identifies stress the continuity of history even as they paint the South as a nation of ghosts. Quentin sees the flaws in the way the South imagines itself, its relationship to history and its movement through time, but he is unable to abandon these faulty imaginings without abandoning his sense of self. A Southerner living after the death of the South, Quentin is forced to conclude, "I was. I am not."

Conclusion: Lives Excommunicated from all Reality

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the characters of the Sutpen story and its narrators seek to make sense of their own lives by contextualizing them in the histories of the South's imagined community. In the antebellum South, this community is imagined in dynastic terms that deny individuality to poor whites as well as slaves. During and after the Civil War, it is re-imagined as a national community and the distinction between rich and poor whites becomes less explicit, though it does not disappear from the cultural imaginings of the descendants of Southern aristocrats. The emotional power of both of these communities comes from their continuity through time, which organizes history and makes the future imaginable. This myth of continuity is justified by the cultural "inheritance" which fathers bequeath to their legitimate sons. Losing a sense of community continuity though time threatens the legitimacy of the South's social order. At the same time, it threatens the individual, most notably Quentin Compson and Charles Bon, with spiritual orphanhood. Many in the South chose to live as ghosts rather than admit to the failure of Southern historical understanding. When Quentin and Bon are most alienated from their pasts, they sense that each historical moment can only be explained on its own terms, rather than as a continuation of the past, but this worldview cannot provide a new or better way of articulating identity. This failure is what prevents Quentin from integrating himself into the economy and society of the modern United States.

Chapter 2: Family as a Residual Historical Narrative in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

It is tempting to interpret Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* through the prism of its final pages, when Aureliano Babilonia, the last of the Buendía family, reads "the history of the family, written by Melquíades, down to the most trivial details, one hundred years ahead of time"* (415). By foreseeing and recording the future of the Buendía family, Melquíades seems to confirm the fatalism which grips Aureliano Babilonia. But Aureliano Babilonia is the first and only Buendía to decipher Melquíades parchments, and he only does so as the final prophecies come to pass. The fatalistic bent of the last Buendías was not a foregone conclusion, but the result of a long series of changes in the way the Buendías imagine their relationship to the history of Macondo. Only as the historical narrative of the Buendía family becomes more distant and disconnected from the reality of Macondo does this fatalism set in.

The relationship between the Buendía family and Macondo, like the relationship between the Sutpens and the South's dynastic social order, provides spiritual fulfillment to the members of the Buendía family by connecting them to a continuous and unbroken historical narrative. When the town is first imagined, it is organized around José Arcadio Buendía and the Buendía family. Initially, both the town and the family are defined by their relationship to one another. The town's social order is derived from the charismatic and hereditary leadership of the Buendía family, while the Buendía family's understanding of its own historical position is based on its position of power within Macondo. These conceptions of town and

* "la historia de la familia, escrita por Melquíades hasta en sus detalles más triviales, con cien años de anticipación" (*Cien* 324)

family are generated by José Arcadio Buendía, who strives to prove that the principles of time operate in concordance with the type of historical thinking on which his design, like Sutpen's, depends. The following generations base their sense of self on their identification with the historical narrative that José Arcadio Buendía constructs.

This historical narrative does not go unchallenged, however, and it soon becomes clear to José Arcadio Buendía that objective time does not actually operate according to the ordered, mechanical principles that make it possible to imagine community continuity through time. His disillusionment converts him into a living ghost, who, like the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*, derives meaning from a history that he believes has ended. This sets a precedent for his descendants, many of whom imagine themselves as ghosts when reality no longer reflects the historical narrative from which they derive meaning.

Two major forces displace and ultimately destroy the Buendía family and its historical narrative: the growing power of the Colombian state and the family's increasingly tenuous understanding of its relationship to Macondo. As the political struggles of Colonel Aureliano Buendía and José Arcadio Segundo reveal, the local power of the Buendía family is at odds with the power of the Colombian state. The authority of each is based in competing and mutually exclusive historical narratives. Initially, Macondo imagines itself as largely autonomous and organized internally around the authority of the Buendía family. This way of imagining Macondo, which justifies the Buendías' elevated position in Macondo's society, is challenged by the national government, which imagines Macondo as part of a larger Colombian state. The conflict between these two narratives proves unsustainable, however, and Colonel Aureliano Buendía, the most active resistor of the authority of the Conservative regime, is forced to reimagine his rebellion on a national scale to effectively challenge

their rule. This shift in imagination reflects the inevitable displacement of the Buendías' local narrative by Colombia's national historical narrative. Once the residents of Macondo accept the national government's version of history, the Buendías must imagine themselves as ghosts to draw meaning from a historical narrative that no longer explains the world around them.

The second reason for the fatalism and disintegration of the Buendía family is the increasingly misunderstood link between the family and the rest of Macondo. To protect the family's privileged position in Macondo's social order, the family members must assert the existence of an essential and eternal difference in class between themselves and the majority of Macondo's population. This requires them to distort the history of their family to hide the many cross-class sexual unions that have been vital to its continuity. As a consequence, the youngest generations of the Buendía family imagine that the family is perpetuated by the production-from-within of great men like José Arcadio Buendía and Colonel Aureliano Buendía rather than by the symbiotic relationship of town and family. Because of this, they look for the Buendía family's future within itself, precluding possibilities for expansion and regeneration as their increasingly incestuous tendencies drive them towards the fatal embrace of a historical narrative that no longer reflects their social reality.

Part 1: José Arcadio Buendía's Design and the Illusion of Progress

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Thomas Sutpen recognizes that the Southern aristocracy imagines time historically to justify the wealth and privilege of Southern planters and attempts to attain the requisite characteristics for membership in that society to give himself and his family a place in history. In *One Hundred Years of*

Solitude, José Arcadio Buendía, the patriarch of the Buendía family, attempts a similar project, building two imagined communities—Macondo and the Buendía family. He is less aware, however, of the political and social implications of imagining time in this way, or that the communities he builds are not guaranteed to progress unhindered through time. In his effort to realize his dream for both communities, José Arcadio Buendía begins the novel by establishing the calendrical time that makes historical imagination possible and seemingly natural. Like Sutpen, he searches for a way to project his family into the future, but confronted by the essentially entropic nature of objective time in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, he ultimately realizes that such a project will result in an eternal repetition of the past. Rather than abandon the historical narratives that give him meaning, he stops perceiving the continued progress of time, preferring, like the ghost narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*, to look back in time and define himself through a history which has already ended. This transition from dynamic patriarch to out-of-touch ghost establishes the problems of identity and history that plague later generations of the Buendía family as they seek to understand their place in history.

Section 1: Revolutionary Beginnings and Historical Futures

José Arcadio Buendía's vision for Macondo relies on the same type of paradoxical thinking that makes Sutpen's design possible. He breaks from the past to establish Macondo, but he and the other members of the Buendía family must imagine that community—and their family's place in it—as part of a continuous and eternal history to give meaning to his project. The terms in which José Arcadio Buendía imagines his journey across the mountains and his decision to found Macondo at the site of his prophetic dream reflect the importance of historical thinking to his design, which, like Sutpen's, aims to build a meaningful place in history for his family.

García Márquez explicitly represents the founding of Macondo as the consequence of José Arcadio Buendía's transgression of preexisting social norms. His incest with his wife and cousin Úrsula Iguarán and his murder of Prudencio Aguilar cause him to lead an exodus from his ancestral village to relieve his guilty conscience. Writing about Thomas Sutpen and José Arcadio Buendía, Zamora argues that, in their respective efforts to establish Sutpen's Hundred and Macondo, "each is hoping to forget his tainted past and begin history again" ("End" 27). This is more accurate for José Arcadio Buendía than it is for Thomas Sutpen. While Sutpen wants to "forget his tainted past" by altering his family's personal relationship to the existing historical narrative of the South, which he largely accepts, José Arcadio Buendía attempts to create an entirely new community through which his family's history can be understood: Macondo.

Like the Sutpen family's journey to Tidewater Virginia, José Arcadio Buendía's exodus cannot be understood through the historical perspective from which he later draws significance. When he, his friends and their families begin their migration, "they did not lay out any definite itinerary. They simply tried to go in a direction opposite to the road to Riohacha so that they would not leave any trace or meet any people they knew. It was an absurd journey"[*] (*One Hundred* 23). Both trips are undertaken without any clearly imagined goal or destination, both ignore and oppose the current social construction of space, and both are characterized as absurd or indescribable by historically minded narrators. The ahistorical or anti-historical quality of these journeys stands in contrast to the emphasis on historical continuity that later characterizes Sutpen's understanding of the South and the historical

[*] "No se trazaron un itinerario definido. Solamente procuraban viajar en sentido contrario al camino de Riohacha para no dejar ningún rastro ni encontrar gente conocida. Fue un viaje absurdo." (Ibid. 26)

narrative of Macondo and the Buendía family. After the foundation of Macondo, "every time that Úrsula became exasperated by her husband's mad ideas, she would leap back over three hundred years of fate and curse the day that Sir Francis Drake had attacked Riohacha"[*] (*One Hundred* 20, translation emended). Úrsula only imagines history as "the prehistory of the present…in a superficial, unilinear, evolutionary way" (Lukacs 176). This reaffirmation of the continuity of history is possible because José Arcadio Buendía establishes a new social order through which history can be interpreted and made meaningful.

The foundation of Macondo inaugurates a new era of historical thinking, centered on the relationship between the Buendía family and the town itself, which provides a new way for the Buendías to understand history and imagine the future. José Arcadio Buendía establishes Macondo in an essentially random location after he dreams "that right there a noisy city with houses having mirror walls rose up. He asked what city it was and they answered him with a name that he had never heard, that had no meaning at all, but that had a supernatural echo in his dream: Macondo"[†] (*One Hundred* 24). Macondo is not named or created because of what it is in the present, but because of what José Arcadio imagines it will be. The link which José Arcadio Buendía draws between his present location and the future city of his dream requires a historical imagination of community, one which sees the future as "a henceforth peaceful evolution on the basis of [his] achievements" (Lukacs 29). His decision to found Macondo where he has his dream mirrors the audacity with which

[*] "cada vez que Úrsula se salía de casillas con las locuras de su marido, saltaba por encima de trecientos años de casualidades, y maldecía la hora en que Francis Drake asaltó a Riohacha" (Ibid. 23)
[†] "José Arcadio Buendía soñó esa noche que en aquel lugar se levantaba una ciudad ruidosa con casas de paredes de espejo. Preguntó qué ciudad era aquella, y le contestaron con un nombre que nunca había oído, que no tenía significado alguno, pero que tuvo en el sueño una resonancia sobrenatural: Macondo." (Ibid. 27)

Sutpen drags "house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing" (*Absalom* 4). For both men, the present and the future exist in unbroken continuity, and it is this smooth, easily imaginable time which allows them to justify their projects. When Melquíades tells José Arcadio Buendía that he has encountered a prediction that Macondo "was to be a luminous city with great glass houses where there was no trace remaining of the race of the Buendías," José Arcadio Buendía tells him, "It's a mistake…they won't be houses of glass but of ice, as I dreamed, and there will always be a Buendía, for a century of centuries"[*] (*One Hundred* 53, translation emended). Ensconced in a new imagined community, José Arcadio Buendía is convinced of the unlimited but predictable relationship the between the past, present, and future, and it is this historical mindset that gives significance to his design.

Section 2: Conquering Natural Time

José Arcadio Buendía's effort to make his town and family into historical constructs is intimately connected with his repeated attempts to create a more exact and "scientific" type of time. For his design to succeed, time must become regular and calculable. He attempts to deny the importance or existence of natural time, preferring to imagine time as a mechanical process rather than an entropic one. His efforts to reify historical time reveal the essential incompatibility between historical time and natural time, which pushes the world towards an unexpected and unknowable future.

After Úrsula connects Macondo to the outside world, José Arcadio Buendía attempts to regularize time in Macondo:

[*] "Una noche creyó encontrar una predicción sobre el futuro de Macondo. Sería una ciudad luminosa, con grandes casas de vidrio, donde no quedaba ningún rastro de la estirpe de los Buendía. 'Es una equivocación', tronó José Arcadio Buendía. 'No serán de vidrio sino de hielo, como lo soñé, y siempre habrá un Buendía, por los siglos de los siglos." (Ibid. 49)

> "in a short time [he] set up a system of order and work which allowed for only one bit of license: the freeing of the birds, which, since the time of the founding, had made time merry with their flutes, and installing in their place musical clocks in every house…which José Arcadio Buendía had synchronized with such precision that every half hour the town grew merry with the progressive chords of the same song until it reached the climax of a noontime that was as exact and unanimous as a complete waltz"[*] (*One Hundred* 39).

The image of clocks simultaneously chiming noon in every house in Macondo powerfully evokes Walter Benjamin's notion of homogenous, empty time. The community of Macondo, and the Buendías within it, moves as a unified mass through the easily marked, easily recorded time established by José Arcadio Buendía. This type of time comes at the expense of the natural time which previously organized Macondo.

José Arcadio Buendía's decision to free the birds is significant because birds are a symbol of natural, dynamic time in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The health and prosperity of Macondo can be charted by measuring the activity of its birds. When Macondo is a prosperous community, the birds "made time merry," but as Macondo falls into abandonment and the Buendía family history ceases to provide a useful way for understanding the world, Macondo's birds leave or die. When Úrsula, the matriarch of the Buendía family and the most active defender of its longevity,

[*] "José Arcadio Buendía impuso en poco tiempo un estado de orden y trabajo, dentro del cual sólo se permitió una licencia: la liberación de los pájaros que desde la época de la fundación alegraban el tiempo con sus flautas, y la instalación en su lugar de relojes musicales en todas las casas…José Arcadio Buendía sincronizó con tanta precisión, que cada media hora el pueblo se alegraba con los acordes progresivos de una misma pieza, hasta alcanzar la culminación de un mediodía exacto y unánime con el valse completo." (Ibid. 38)

dies, "very few people were at the funeral, partly because there were not many left who remembered her, and partly because it was so hot that noon that the birds in their confusion were running into the walls like clay pigeons and breaking through screens to die in the bedrooms"[*] (*One Hundred* 342-343). The birds symbolize the natural longevity of Macondo, and their death is juxtaposed against the calendrical "noon" established long before by José Arcadio Buendía. By replacing its first birds with mechanical clocks, José Arcadio Buendía reimagines Macondo not as the natural and temporary product of a specific historical circumstance, but as a community whose essential characteristics and internal structure will remain unchanged even as the town moves forward in time.

The Buendía family's belief in the ordered, mechanical progress of time and the permanence of both their family line and the town of Macondo distorts their ability to adapt to the world's changing social order. Much as Sutpen attempts to rebuild his plantation after the Civil War, Amaranta Úrsula returns with twenty-five pairs of birds "so that she could repopulate the skies of Macondo"[†] (*One Hundred* 379). The narrator explains:

> "That was the most lamentable of her numerous frustrated undertakings. As the birds reproduced Amaranta Úrsula would release them in pairs, and no sooner did they feel themselves free than they fled the town. She tried in vain to awaken love in them by means of the birdcage that Úrsula had built during the first reconstruction of the house…and arousing the captives so that their

[*] "muy poca gente asistió al entierro, en parte porque no eran muchos quienes se acordaban de ella, y en parte porque ese mediodía hubo tanto calor que los pájaros desorientados se estrellaban como perdigones contra las paredes y rompían las mallas metálicas de las ventanas para morirse en los dormitorios." (Ibid. 269)

[†] "para repoblar el cielo de Macondo" (Ibid. 297)

> songs would dissuade the deserters, because they would take flight on their first attempt and make a turn in the sky, just the time needed to find the direction to the Fortunate Isles."* (379)

Natural time is inimical to the sustained projection of any imagined community. Amaranta Úrsula's efforts to reestablish the bird population in Macondo illustrate the unrecognized distance between the imagined community history that gives meaning to the Buendía family and the objective progression of events through time. Establishing this type of thought requires the "invention" of historical time. José Arcadio Buendía's installation of the clocks, which displaces and denies natural time, makes Amaranta Úrsula's ill-fated return conceivable.

Section 3: The Breakdown of Time and the End of History

Ironically, José Arcadio Buendía is the first person to recognize that objective, natural time does not operate according to the mechanical principles that make it possible to imagine Macondo as an eternal and unchanging community. Like the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*, he is unable to abandon his historical understanding of the world and concludes, instead, that history has ended. The border between life and death, which history is designed to transcend, becomes entirely meaningless when José Arcadio Buendía no longer feels compelled to imagine the future. He exists as a ghost—first figuratively, then literally—unaware of the continued progress of time.

* "Esa fue la más lamentable de sus numerosas iniciativas frustradas. A medida que los pájaros se reproducían, Amaranta Úrsula los iba soltando por parejas, y más tardaban en sentirse libres que en fugarse del pueblo. En vano procuró encariñarlas con la pajarera que construyó Úrsula en la primera restauración….y alborotó a los cautivos para que sus cantos disuadieran a los desertores porque éstos se remontaban a la primera tentativa y deban una vuelta en el cielo, apenas el tiempo indispensable para encontrar el rumbo de regreso a las islas Afortunadas." (Ibid. 297)

José Arcadio Buendía's obsession with invention and progress, a symptom of his historical thinking, leads him to conclude that "the machine of time has broken"[*] (*One Hundred* 78, translation emended) when his efforts to build a perpetual motion machine ends in failure. José Arcadio Buendía "got what he was looking for" when "he connected the mechanism of the clock to a mechanical ballerina, and the toy danced uninterruptedly to the rhythm of her own music for three days"[†] (*One Hundred* 76). As he ponders the implications of this partial success, he loses touch with his historically constructed reality:

> "[He would] spend the nights…searching for a way to apply the principles of the pendulum to…everything that was useful put in motion. The fever of insomnia fatigued him so much that one dawn he could not recognize the old man with white hair and uncertain gestures who came into his bedroom. It was Prudencio Aguilar. When he finally identified him, startled that the dead also aged, José Arcadio Buendía felt himself shaken by nostalgia"[‡] (76-77).

It is immediately after the appearance of Prudencio Aguilar that José Arcadio Buendía becomes convinced that time has stopped. He says to Aureliano, "suddenly I realized that it's still Monday, like yesterday"[§] (77). Many of the important types of time in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are at work in this scene. The clock-powered dancing of the ballerina reflects the ideal of historical time, which, like the ripple space which Quentin describes in *Absalom, Absalom!*, allows the subject move to its

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[*] "La máquina del tiempo se ha descompuesto" (Ibid. 68)
[†] "consiguió por fin lo que buscaba: conectó a una bailarina de cuerda el mecanismo del reloj, y el juguete bailó sin interrupción al compás de su propia música durante tres días" (Ibid. 67)
[‡] "pasaba las noches…buscando la manera de aplicar los principios del péndulo a…todo lo que fuera útil puesto en movimiento. Lo fatigó tanto la fiebre del insomnio que una madrugada no pudo reconocer al anciano de cabeza blanca y ademanes inciertos que entró en su dormitorio. Era Prudencio Aguilar. Cuando por fin lo identificó, asombrado de que también envejecieran los muertos, José Arcadio Buendía se sintió sacudido por la nostalgia." (Ibid. 67)
[§] "de pronto me he dado cuenta de que sigue siendo lunes, como ayer" (Ibid. 68)

own ineradicable rhythm. The decomposition of this rhythm and the aging of Prudencio Aguilar's ghost reveal that natural time wears away at and disrupts historical continuity. He stops perceiving the progress of time at the same moment in which he realizes that it was impossible to use a pendulum machine "to help men fly"[*] because "a pendulum could lift anything into the air but it could not lift itself"[†] (78). The same entropic principle is true of the imagined communities of Macondo and the Buendía family, and of historical time in general. Imagined community history asserts a link between past, present, and future, but it cannot guarantee that connection. Only by actively molding the present to conform to the order of the past can imagined communities sustain the myths that legitimize them.

This explains why, when José Arcadio Buendía arises on Friday and remains convinced that it is Monday, he "grabbed the bar from a door and with the savage violence of his uncommon strength he smashed to dust the equipment in the alchemy room" and "was preparing to finish off with the rest of the house when Aureliano asked the neighbors for help"[‡] (78, translation emended). When time stops, the notions of family and community that had motivated José Arcadio Buendía become incomprehensible. The house, which is the most tangible and long-lasting symbol of the Buendía family, becomes the target of his disillusion.

The inevitable decomposition of imagined communities has very real spiritual consequences for the characters of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Prudencio Aguilar returns because "the yearning for the living was so intense, the need for company so

[*] "una máquina de péndulo que le sirviera al hombre para volar" (Ibid. 68)
[†] "el péndulo podía levantar a cualquier cosa en el aire pero no podía levantarse a sí mismo" (Ibid. 68)
[‡] "agarró la tranca de una puerta y con la violencia salvaje de su fuerza descomunal destrozó hasta convertirlos en polvo los aparatos de alquimia….Se disponía a terminar con el resto de la casa cuando Aureliano pidió ayuda a los vecinos." (Ibid. 68-69)

pressing, so terrifying the nearness of that other death which exists within death, that [he] had ended up loving his worst enemy"[*] (77). His fear reveals the existential importance of imagined communities, which keep the dead from "that other death which exists within death" by binding them historically to the present and future, but it also reveals their artificiality. The ghosts of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are only kept alive as long as they are valued and remembered by those who draw meaning from their shared history. Faced with the impossibility of sustaining meaning across time without actively seeking to repeat the past, José Arcadio Buendía, like the Southern narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*, becomes a ghost of his own past, unable to recognize the continued progress of time. Right before his death, the narrators explain that "for a long time, the only person with whom José Arcadio Buendía was able to have contact was Prudencio Aguilar"[†] (*One Hundred* 139, translation emended). In José Arcadio Buendía's mind, "it was Prudencio Aguilar who cleaned him, fed him, and brought him splendid news of an unknown person called Aureliano who was a colonel in the war"[‡] (139). José Arcadio Buendía has rejected Macondo and the future of the Buendía family as impossible illusions. Instead, he perceives the world in terms of the society that existed before his exodus and the founding of Macondo. José Arcadio Buendía serves as both the patriarch of the Buendía family and the first example of how a rupture between historical thinking and natural time can cause a self-inflicted "ghosting" like that of Mr. Compson and Rosa Coldfield.

[*] "era tan intense la añoranza de los vivos, tan apremiante la necesidad de compañía, tan aterradora la proximidad de la otra muerte que existía dentro de la muerte, que Prudencio Aguilar había terminado por querer al peor de sus enemigos." (Ibid. 67)
[†] "la única persona con quien él podía tener contacto desde hacía mucho tiempo, era Prudencio Aguilar." (Ibid. 115)
[‡] "Era Prudencio Aguilar quien lo limpiaba, le daba de comer y le llevaba noticias espléndidas de un desconocido que se llamaba Aureliano y que era coronel en la guerra."(Ibid. 116)

The problems of time, history, and identity which plague the Buendía family throughout *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are encapsulated in the story of José Arcadio Buendía. His vision for the unlimited future of Macondo and the Buendía family establishes a new imagined-community history through which his descendants understand themselves. His efforts to regulate and organize time illustrate the essential incompatibility between the natural time of the universe and the historical time of imagined communities. Ultimately, his mental breakdown reveals how a devotion to a historical understanding of time prevents the characters of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* from adapting to or accepting social change. Just as José Arcadio Buendía chooses to define his experience, however incorrectly, through his memory of Prudencio Aguilar, his descendants choose to understand themselves through the family's history in Macondo, even after that imagined community can no longer produce productive futures.

Part 2: The End of the Buendía Epoch

The crises of imagined-community history in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are not random. They occur when the historical narratives that give meaning to Southern aristocrats and the Buendía family are threatened and displaced by increasingly powerful and integrated national communities. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, it is the Civil War and the reunification of the United States which undoes the social order of the South and dislodges the dominant narrative of the Southern aristocracy. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, as the power of the Colombian state grows, Macondo's social order is disrupted and reimagined around a national historical narrative. Several Buendías, most notably Colonel Aureliano Buendía,

strive to resist the national historical narrative that cedes legitimacy to the Colombian government, but the unequal nature of the conflict between Macondo's local elite and national government forces him to conceive of his rebellion on an increalingly large scale. This seemingly inevitable nationalizing process diminishes the power and legitimacy of the Buendía family, making their history a residual, rather than dominant, form of understanding. The surviving Buendías, who continue to understand themselves as part of the family's continuous and coherent history in Macondo, are distanced from the town and from the outside world. Their inability or unwillingness to abandon this old relationship of family and community prevents them from imagining a future outside Macondo and reinforces the isolation and fatalism which ultimately dooms the family.

Two major ruptures define the displacement of the Buendía family from the center of Macondo's historical narrative: the civil war and the banana company massacre. In the first conflict, Colonel Aureliano Buendía presents a potent threat to the Conservative national government, but, as he comes to realize, any organized resistance to the Conservative regime will require a reimagining of the origins of local authority within a national framework. Such a change is no less dangerous to the Buendía family's historical understanding of Macondo than the encroaching power of the national government. Colonel Aureliano Buendía's defeat and disillusionment mark the end of the Buendía family as a focal point for power in the social structure of Macondo. The second conflict, between the banana plantation workers of José Arcadio Segundo and the corrupt partnership of the Colombian government and the American banana company, reaffirms the diminished importance of the Buendía family to Macondo's social order and thus the ideological distance between the Buendía family and the town. Colonel Aureliano Buendía and José Arcadio Segundo

handle their respective defeats differently, but both disillusionments reinforce the importance of imagined community for structuring time and history. Without the framework of the Buendía family, neither can imagine a productive future for themselves.

Section 1: Colonel Aureliano Buendía and the Decline of Local Communities

The civil war in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* represents more than a conflict between competing Liberal and Conservative ideologies; it also represents a contest for legitimacy between the local historical narrative of the Buendía family and the national historical narrative of the Colombian state. Macondo is originally imagined as whole and autonomous, with authority emanating from the Buendía family at its center. As the novel progresses, however, the national government increasingly asserts its own vision for Macondo, as one piece of the larger nation. This narrative leaves no place for local elites like the Buendía, locating authority above and beyond Macondo. Colonel Aureliano Buendía leads the most active resistance to the Conservative national government, but like the South, which is forced to reimagine itself as a nation to resist the authority of the United States, the scale of the Colombian civil war forces Colonel Aureliano Buendía to adopt expansive national rhetoric. Much as the aristocratic parameters of Sutpen's design lose their importance after the South became a nation, Colonel Aureliano Buendía's ultimate affirmation of the legitimacy of a national historical narrative causes him to lose faith in the continuity of the Buendía family and the community of which it was a part.

The arrival of Don Apolinar Moscote, the first Corregidor of Macondo, highlights the different power structures vying for legitimacy in Macondo's imagined

community. At the outset of the novel, Macondo is organized by the power and leadership of José Arcadio Buendía. When Don Apolinar returns to Macondo with soldiers, "the founders of Macondo, resolving to expel the invaders, went with their older sons to put themselves at the disposal of José Arcadio Buendía"[*] (*One Hundred* 57). The situation is resolved peacefully, but the incident establishes the Buendía family and the national government as two competing power structures. José Arcadio Buendía is described as a "young patriarch "[†] (8), and, like all dynastic communities, his family's is imagined to be eternal and hereditary, so that the founder's sons are expected to take up the same subordinate position as their fathers in support of him.

The increasing tension between Macondo and the national government is not the result of simple ideological disagreement, but of the government's assertion of an authority that has no legitimacy within the original historical narrative of Macondo. Before the war begins, "Aureliano at that time had very confused notions about the difference between Conservatives and Liberals"[‡] and did not "understand how people arrived at the extreme of waging war over things that could not be touched with the hand"[§] (*One Hundred* 95). The terms in which Conservatives like Don Apolinar Moscote imagine Colombia are fundamentally incommensurable with those which the people of Macondo use to imagine their own communities. When Don Apolinar tries to show José Arcadio Buendía that he has "been named magistrate of this town,"[**] José Arcadio Buendía replies, "In this town we do not give orders with pieces of

[*] "Los fundadores de Macondo, resueltos a expulsar a los invasores, fueron con sus hijos mayores a ponerse a la disposición de José Arcadio Buendía." (Ibid. 52)
[†] "José Arcadio Buendía era una especie de patriarca juvenil" (Ibid.11)
[‡] "Aureliano tenía en esa época nociones muy confusas sobre las diferencias entre conservadores y liberales" (Ibid. 82)
[§] "no entendía cómo se llegaba al extremo de hacer una guerra por cosas que no podían tocarse con las manos" (Ibid. 82)
[**] "he sido nombrado corregidor de este pueblo"(Ibid. 51)

paper"[*] (56). Don Apolinar points to the outside authority of Colombia's national government to legitimize himself, while José Arcadio Buendía does not recognize such authority. For him, it is an autonomous and sovereign "we" who governs Macondo.

The disconnect between the way Macondo imagines its social order and the way Conservatives imagine it is so great that the people of Macondo do not see their belief in local authority as a political stance. As Aureliano watches his father-in-law prepare for the elections, "it seemed an exaggeration to him that…his father-in-law had them send six soldiers armed with rifles…to a town with no political passions"[†] (95). The people of Macondo do not have a strongly felt opinion about the policies of the national government, because they do not derive their connection to history from that authority. Instead, they resent the increasing control of the national government because it infringes on what they imagine to be their legitimate social order. When Don Apolinar rigs the vote in Macondo, "what really caused indignation in the town was not the results of the election but the fact that the soldiers had not returned the weapons"[‡] (96). Their preference for local authority is visible even in the ways in which they protest government control. After the election, "a group of women spoke with Aureliano so that he could obtain the return of their kitchen knives from his father-in-law"[§] (96). In the minds of Macondo's residents, the Buendía family is still the seat of authority.

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[*] "En este pueblo no mandamos con papeles" (Ibid. 51)
[†] "Le pareció una exageración que su suegro se hiciera enviar para las elecciones seis soldados armados…en un pueblo sin pasiones políticas." (Ibid. 82)
[‡] "Lo que en realidad causó indignación en el pueblo no fue el resultado de las elecciones, sino el hecho de que los soldados no hubieran devuelto las armas." (Ibid. 83)
[§] "Un grupo de mujeres habló con Aureliano para que consiguiera con su suegro la restitución de los cuchillos de cocina." (Ibid. 83)

Before the outbreak of the war, the local historical narrative of Macondo is not situated within any larger framework. It is only the disparity in power between the local narrative of the Buendía family and the national narrative of the Conservative regime that causes those who resist the authority of the national government to adopt federalist rhetoric. Don Apolinar Moscote characterizes the Liberals as "bad people" who want "to cut the country up into a federal system that would take power away from any supreme authority"[*] (*One Hundred* 95). This political position is clearly more amenable to Macondo's local elites than the centralism of the Conservatives, but it still derives its legitimacy from a nationally imagined system of political authority. Under the leadership of José Arcadio Buendía, Macondo is imagined without such concessions to outside power. It is only reluctantly that Aureliano Buendía describes himself as a Liberal. He says to his friends, "if I have to be something I'll be a Liberal…because the Conservatives are tricky"[†] (96). By forcing the Macondo's local elites—the Buendía family and the descendants of the founders—to think in national terms, the Conservatives successfully undermine the imagined-community history of the Buendía family.

As the civil war advances, Colonel Aureliano Buendía is forced to imagine the conflict as one of ever increasing historical scope. This change shatters his connection to the imagined-community history of the Buendía family and leaves him without a coherent justification for his actions. While Aureliano rises to be "Commander in Chief of the revolutionary forces, with jurisdiction and command from one border to

[*] "Los liberales…gente de mala índole, partidaria…de despedazar el país en un sistema federal que despojara de poderes a la autoridad suprema." (Ibid. 82)
[†] "Si hay que ser algo, sería liberal…porque los conservadores son unos tramposos." (Ibid. 83)

the other"[*] (*One Hundred* 103), he "had not expected any of that on the dawn he left with his twenty-one men to join the forces of General Victorio Medina"[†] (104). His initial assault on the Conservative regime is designed to protect Macondo from its power, not to replace that government with his own. When Aureliano Buendía goes to war, he tells Arcadio, "we leave [Macondo] to you in good shape; try to have it in better shape when we return"[‡] (104). This local conception of the war, which makes the well-being of Macondo its goal, is gradually replaced by a grander imagined narrative. In the second stage of the war, Colonel Aureliano Buendía "would show up under different names farther and farther away from his own country. Later it would be learned that the idea that was working on him at the time was the unification of the federalist forces of Central America in order to wipe out Conservative regimes from Alaska to Patagonia"[§] (145). What began as local resistance ends in an embrace of unifying ideology. Even if Colonel Aureliano Buendía's politics are still more amenable to local power than those of the Conservatives, the imagined-community history of the Buendía must be sacrificed to re-contextualize the conflict on a national and international scale. Colonel Aureliano Buendía can only justify such a mobilization of force by reimagining Macondo within a larger social order.

When Colonel Aureliano Buendía realizes that the only way to defeat the Conservative regime is to adopt the same tactics of unification and consolidation which had caused the rebellion in the first place, he loses faith in the historical narrative of federalism and in the original imagined-community history of Macondo

[*] "comandante general de las fuerzas revolucionarias, con jurisdicción y mando de una frontera a la otra" (Ibid. 88)
[†] "ni siguiera eso esperaba la madrugada en que se fue con sus veintiún hombres a reunirse con las fuerzas del general Victorio Medina" (Ibid. 88)
[‡] "Te lo dejamos bien, procura que lo encontremos mejor." (Ibid. 88)
[§] "Aparecía con nombres distintos cada vez más lejos de su tierra. Después había de saberse que la idea que entonces lo animaba era la unificación de las fuerzas federalistas de la América Central, para barrer con los regímenes conservadores desde Alaska hasta la Patagonia." (Ibid. 120)

and is left without a way of understanding himself historically. The need for a central authority is made obvious to Colonel Aureliano Buendía when he calls "a second assembly of the principal rebel commanders" and realizes that their "differences of values were on the verge of causing an internal explosion"* (*One Hundred* 165). He succeeds in unifying them by murdering his most charismatic opponents, but "the same night that his authority was recognized by all the rebel commands, he woke up in a fright, calling for a blanket. An inner coldness which shattered his bones and tortured him even in the heat of the sun would not let him sleep"† (166). It is then that Colonel Aureliano Buendía finds himself "lost in the solitude of his immense power"‡ (166). Eventually, "alone, abandoned by his premonitions, fleeing the chill that was to accompany him until death, he sought a last refuge in Macondo in the warmth of his oldest memories"§ (167). This inner coldness, which arrives at the moment that he consolidates his authority, reflects the rupture that has separated him from the imagined-community that once gave meaning to his actions. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Quentin's decision to participate in the modern economy of the North prevents him from drawing meaning from his Southern past. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the pragmatic considerations of war cause Colonel Aureliano Buendía to abandon the historical narrative that justified the war in the first place, and in doing so, loses his sense of identity.

* "convocó una segunda asamblea de los principales comandantes rebeldes…cuyas diferencias de criterio estuvieron a punto de provocar una explosión interna" (Ibid. 135)
† "La misma noche en que su autoridad fue reconocida por todos los comandos rebeldes, despertó sobresaltado, pidiendo a gritos una manta. Un frío interior que le rayaba los huesos y lo mortificaba inclusive a pleno sol le impidió dormir" (Ibid. 136)
‡ "Extraviado en la soledad de su inmenso poder" (Ibid. 136)
§ "Solo, abandonado por los presagios, huyendo el frío que había de acompañarlo hasta l muerte, buscó un último refugio en Macondo, al calor de sus recuerdos más antiguos." (Ibid. 136)

Section 2: The Banana Company Massacre and Residual History

The conflict between the original historical narrative of Macondo, which legitimizes the Buendías central position in Macondo's social order, and the national historical narrative, which displaces them, determines the increasing isolation and fatalism of the Buendía family. The family continues to understand itself through its importance to the original historical narrative of Macondo, but its members fail to take an active role in Macondo's political order. José Arcadio Segundo, the last to represent a threat to the authority of the Conservative government, turns himself into a ghost rather than confront the new social and political reality of Macondo.

The aftermath of the banana company massacre reveals the thoroughness with which time has been reimagined around the national imagined community of Colombia. The conflict between the Buendía family and the national government has been relegated to the remote past, and the Buendías are no longer seen as a legitimate threat to the peaceful and ordered progress Colombia's national history. When the government denies the banana company massacre, the townspeople eventually accept that "nothing has happened in Macondo, nothing has ever happened, and nothing ever will happen. This is a happy town."[*] (*One Hundred* 309-310). The national government's version of events not only denies the massacre, it rewrites the entire history of Macondo.

Once Macondo's history is reimagined within a national imagined community, the threat that the Buendía family once posed to the national government becomes illegitimate, remote, and incomprehensible. As José Arcadio Segundo

[*] "En Macondo no ha pasado nada, ni está pasando ni pasará nunca. Este es un pueblo feliz." (Ibid. 244)

returns home after the massacre, he stops in the kitchen of a townswoman who informs him that "there haven't been any dead here…since the time of your uncle, nothing has happened in Macondo"* (*One Hundred* 308). Because she believes the national narrative, she imagines Macondo's history since the end of the civil war as one of "peaceful evolution." When a military officer and six soldiers search Melquíades' room looking for José Arcadio Segundo, they do not find him because "the young officer had seen the room with the same eyes as Colonel Aureliano Buendía"† (*One Hundred* 312). That is to say, the officer, like Colonel Aureliano Buendía, does not believe in the historical narrative that places the Buendía family at the center of Macondo's social order. As he searches for José Arcadio Segundo, the officer describes Colonel Aureliano Buendía as "one of our greatest men,"‡ (311). Taking one of Colonel Aureliano Buendía's golden fish, he says, "At one time they were a mark of subversion, but now they're relics"§ (311). Just as it is impossible for the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* to comprehend Sutpen's class transgression, those who believe in the continuous and eternal history of the Colombian nation cannot imagine the Buendía family as a legitimate or viable threat to that history. Eventually, the Buendía family disappears completely from Macondo's public consciousness. When Aureliano Babilonia mentions Colonel Aureliano Buendía in the "house of the girls who went to bed because of hunger," the proprietress "argued with a madam's wrathful passion that Colonel Aureliano Buendía, of whom she had indeed heard speak at some time, was a character invented by the government as a pretext for

* "Aquí no ha habido muertos…Desde los tiempos de tu tío, el coronel, no ha pasado nada en Macondo." (Ibid. 242)
† "el joven militar había visto el cuarto con los mismos ojos con que lo vio el coronel Aureliano Buendía" (Ibid. 246)
‡ "El coronel Aureliano Buendía fue uno de nuestros más grandes hombres." (Ibid. 245)
§ "En un tiempo fueron una clave de subversión, pero ahora son una reliquia." (Ibid. 245)

killing Liberals"[*] (*One Hundred* 390, translation emended). Only the Buendías themselves, like the ghost narrators of the defeated South, continue to draw meaning from what has become an archaic historical narrative.

Section 3: The Buendía Imagination and the End of History

After Colombia's national historical imagination becomes the dominant way of understanding Macondo's history, the Buendía family can no longer envision a productive future for itself. Like the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*, they either imagine themselves as ghosts of a history that has already ended or lose their ability to interpret the present as part of a continuous history. Most in the Buendía family attempt to deny the continued progress of time in order to cling to the historical narrative that once justified their prominence within Macondo's imagined community. Conversely, Colonel Aureliano Buendía rejects the possibility of historical narrative, either familial or national, and is left without a way of making sense of the present.

While José Arcadio Buendía stops perceiving the progress of time long before the displacement of the Buendía family from Macondo's historical narrative, he embraces the same type of thinking that characterizes many of his descendants after Macondo is absorbed into Colombia's national historical narrative. Right before José Arcadio Buendía dies, the narrator of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* explains that:

> "When he was alone, José Arcadio Buendía consoled himself with the dream of the infinite rooms. He dreamed that he was getting out of bed, opening the door, and going into an identical room…from that room he would go into another that was just the same...he liked to go from room to room, as in a

[*] "Hasta la dueña, que no solía intervenir en las conversaciones, discutió con una rabiosa pasión de comadrona que el coronel Aureliano Buendía, de quien en efecto había oído hablar vez, era un personaje inventado por el gobierno como un pretexto un pretexto para matar liberales." (Ibid. 305)

> gallery of parallel mirrors, until Prudencio Aguilar would touch him on the shoulder. Then he would go back from room to room, walking in reverse…and he would find Prudencio Aguilar in the room of reality. But one night…Prudencio Aguilar touched his shoulder in an intermediate room and he stayed there forever, thinking that it was the real room"* (*One Hundred* 140).

This dream reflects the thinking of a man who believes that "the machine of time is broken." Because José Arcadio Buendía can only understand the present as a continuous reproduction of the past, the line between life and death loses all significance. José Arcadio Buendía "dies" when he mistakes one identical room for another. In *Writing the Apocalypse*, Zamora writes, "Memories are important to the Buendías because they offer the illusory possibility of transcending the momentary….the possibility of participating in duration. It is thus poignantly ironic that throughout the novel memories are associated not with duration but with death. The character's most vivid memories are recounted as they realize they are about to die" (29). While she is correct that memories provide the illusory possibility of "participating in duration," that illusion is made more powerful, not less, by its juxtaposition with death. Death is made permeable by a belief in the continuity of history. That is why so many characters in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are able to return as ghosts. Indeed, it becomes the primary way for characters to understand themselves after the Buendías have lost their importance to the rest of Macondo.

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* "Cuando estaba solo, José Arcadio Buendía se consolaba con el sueño de los cuartos infinitos. Soñaba que se levantaba de la cama, abría la puerta y pasaba a otro cuarto igual…de ese cuarto pasaba a otro exactamente igual…Le gustaba irse de cuarto en cuarto, como en una galería de espejos paralelos, hasta que Prudencio Aguilar le tocaba el hombro. Entonces regresaba de cuarto en cuarto, despertando hacía atrás…y encontraba Prudencio Aguilar, en el cuarto de la realidad. Pero una noche…Prudencio Aguilar le tocó el hombro en un cuarto intermedio, y él se quedó allí para siempre, creyendo que era el cuarto real." (Ibid. 116)

After the massacre, José Arcadio Segundo adopts the ghost-like perspective of his great-grandfather, José Arcadio Buendía. Like Rosa Coldfield, who returns to her father's house to live out her life as a ghost of the South's imagined community, José Arcadio Segundo retreats into Melquíades' room to deny the continued progress of time. When Úrsula encourages him to take a bath, "the simple idea of abandoning the room that had given him peace terrified José Arcadio Segundo…because he did not want to see the train with two hundred cars loaded with dead people which left Macondo every day at dusk on its way to the sea"[*] (*One Hundred* 335). Both Aureliano Segundo and Úrsula recognize in José Arcadio Segundo the symptoms of his great-grandfather's "irreparable fate"[†] (313). Just as José Arcadio Buendía is visited every day by Prudencio Aguilar, José Arcadio Segundo relives the day of the banana company massacre. He is incapable of assimilating into the social order of the Conservative government, or of imagining a future for himself. A ghost of the Buendías' historical narrative, he is literally imprisoned by an understanding of history that no longer corresponds to the world in which he lives.

Alternatively, Colonel Aureliano Buendía's disillusionment causes him to embrace the same situational temporal perspective that threatened to overcome Quentin Compson in *Absalom, Absalom!*. Incapable of drawing meaning from his memories of the past or of imagining a future for himself, he experiences the world as a continuous and inexplicable present, unable to perceive the symbols that reify the historical narrative of the Buendías. Colonel Aureliano Buendía is "the only inhabitant of the house who did not continue to see" his father's ghost, "the powerful

[*] "La simple idea de abandonar el cuarto que le había proporcionado la paz, aterrorizó a José Arcadio Segundo…porque no quería ver el tren de doscientos vagones cargados de muertos que cada atardecer partía de Macondo hacia el mar." (Ibid. 264).
[†] "le bastó aquella Mirada para ver repetido en él el destino irreparable del bisabuelo" (Ibid. 246)

old man who had been beaten down by half a century in the open air"[*] (*One Hundred* 241, translation emended). Ghosts represent the power of historical thinking to transcend death. Without faith in that type of thinking, Colonel Aureliano Buendía cannot see the ghosts which reflect his family's continuity through time. Instead, he perceives the continued progress of time as ugly and meaningless. García Márquez writes, "while the rest of the family was still amazed by the fact that Melquíades' room was immune to dust and destruction, [Colonel Aureliano Buendía] saw it turned into a dunghill"[†] (261). When he enters the room, "an unbearable smell of rotten memories" floats "in that air that had been the purest and brightest in the house"[‡] (241). Melquíades' room, where José Arcadio Buendía takes refuge in his family's historical narrative, looks to Colonel Aureliano Buendía like the "pile of debris" which confronts the Benjamin's Angel of History. Stripped of any living connection to his past, Colonel Aureliano Buendía experiences the passage of time as inexplicable, monstrous, and devoid of meaning.

The spiritual implications of Colonel Aureliano Buendía's situational thinking are made clear by his own recurrent dream, which stands in stark contrast with José Arcadio Buendía's. Before Colonel Aureliano Buendía's death, he dreams:

> "that he was going into an empty house with white walls and that he was disquieted by the burden of being the first human being to enter it. In the dream he remembered that he had dreamed the same thing the night before and on many nights over the past years and he knew that the image would be

[*] "El coronel Aureliano Buendía era el único habitante de la casa que no seguía viendo al potente anciano agobiado por medio siglo de intemperie." (Ibid. 193)
[†] "mientras el resto de la familia seguía asombrándose de que la pieza de Melquíades fuera inmune al polvo y la destrucción, él la veía convertida en un muladar." (Ibid. 207)
[‡] "en el aire que había sido el más puro y luminoso de la casa flotaba un insoportable olor de recuerdos podridos." (Ibid. 192-93)

> erased from his memory when he awakened because that recurrent dream had the quality of not being remembered except with the dream itself"[*] (265, translation emended).

Given the importance of the Buendía home both as symbol of the family and as a witness to its destruction, it is telling that Colonel Aureliano Buendía dreams of being the first to enter an empty home. Without the structure of an historical narrative, Colonel Aureliano Buendía has no framework for making sense of his experiences. He lives in a continuous present, but unlike his father, Colonel Aureliano Buendía's present is not a repetition of the past, but a constant and inexplicable newness, disconnected from any meaning. *Pesadumbre*, which Gregory Rabassa translates as "burden," can also refer to a feeling of sadness, displeasure, or anxiety. The divide between these two ways of experiencing the world, either as a repetition of the past or as incomprehensible novelty, is reminiscent of the choice which faces Quentin Compton in *Absalom, Absalom!*. Where José Arcadio Buendía's dream consoles, Colonel Aureliano Buendía's dream unsettles.

Thus the Colombian national government's increasing power in Macondo represents a challenge, not just to the authority of the Buendía family, but to the vision of history that legitimizes that authority. While Colonel Aureliano Buendía sets out to defend Macondo's existing social order, he is forced to reimagine his conflict on a national and international scale to justify his authority over the various local

[*] "Soñó que entraba en una casa vacía, de paredes blancas y que lo inquietaba la pesadumbre de ser el primer ser humano que entraba en ella. En el sueño recordó que había soñado lo mismo la noche anterior y en muchas noches de los últimos años, y sipo que la imagen se habría borrado de su memoria al despertar, porque aquel sueño recurrente tenía la virtud de no ser recordado sino dentro del mismo sueño." (Ibid. 210)

rebels groups that compose his army. This change in his understanding of history separates him from his own family's historical narrative and undermines his ability to imagine any continuity between the past, present and future. His defeat signals the triumph of the national historical narrative, which becomes the dominant way of understanding Macondo's history and social order. The Buendías, however, cling to Macondo's old historical narrative and, as a consequence, are forced to imagine themselves as ghosts, like José Arcadio Segundo, or as completely separated from history, like Colonel Aureliano Buendía. Neither provides a productive vision for the future.

Part 3: Macondo, Class, and the Buendía family

While the conflict between dynastic families and an increasingly powerful national government is familiar to those who have read *Absalom, Absalom!*, another, more novel threat to the historical narrative of the Buendía family emerges in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: natural time. The entropic force of objective time persistently works to unravel communities and families and its operation must be denied for the historical narratives of those communities to be believed. This becomes an issue for the Buendía family, because their insistence on the family's eternally elevated position in Macondo's social order causes younger generations to ignore the changing social reality of the town. This denial causes the family to turn inward, searching within itself for a "great man" to fulfill the legacy of José Arcadio Buendía, unwilling to acknowledge the progressive disintegration of town and family and unable to imagine or participate in a productive future.

Section 1: Controlling the Growth of the Buendía Family

The Buendía family begins as both the organizing principal of Macondo's society and the historical construct which justifies the continuation of its social order through time. While the family must expand to produce heirs, the social boundaries that elevate the Buendía family above the majority of Macondo must be strictly maintained. For this reason, relationships between members of the Buendía family and those of lower social standing are hidden and removed from the family history. At the same time, a conscious effort is made to find partners whose social position is equal to that of the Buendías. This obfuscation distorts the Buendías perception of their relationship to Macondo and ultimately causes the family to turn in upon itself.

The relationship between José Arcadio, José Arcadio Buendía's son, and Pilar Ternera is the first example of a relationship between a Buendía and a member of the lower class. The family's, and particularly Úrsula's, reaction to the affair indicates the social stigma attached to interclass relationships. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, as in *Absalom, Absalom!*, such relationships threaten to erase the boundary between two supposedly eternal and immutable categories, rich and poor. When Pilar Ternera is first introduced, the narrator establishes her lower socio-economic status, describing her as "a merry, foul-mouthed, provocative woman" who "came to the house to help with the chores"[*] (*One Hundred* 25). While it is never established that her relationship with José Arcadio is forbidden because of her social standing, it is made clear that their relationship must be kept hidden. José Arcadio complains about their secrecy, saying, "One of these days I'm going to tell everybody and we can stop all of

[*] "una mujer alegre, deslenguada, provocativa, que ayudaba en los oficios domésticos" (Ibid. 28)

this sneaking around"[*] (29), but he never follows through on this declaration. The taboo nature of their relationship is reaffirmed when he tells Aureliano about the affair. Aureliano understands "only the risk, the immense possibility of danger that his brother's adventure implied"[†] (29). Even calling the relationship an "adventure" suggests the attitude which the Buendía family maintains toward the lower class. Pilar Ternera would not be an acceptable wife or mother to the Buendía family; she is suitable only for "adventure." The importance of preventing sexual relationships between the Buendía family and the lower class, and of denying them when they do occur, is revealed by Úrsula's decision to hide from Arcadio—José Arcadio and Pilar Ternera's son—the truth about his origins. When Arcadio is brought to the Buendía house, "Úrsula admitted him grudgingly, conquered once more by the obstinacy of her husband, who could not tolerate the idea that an offshoot of his blood should be adrift, but she imposed the condition that the child should never know his true identity" [‡§] (37, translation emended). Arcadio's true paternity is never revealed to preserve the illusion that the Buendía family belongs to an elevated class in Macondo. Where Sutpen makes the decision to reject Bon to preserve the class in which he wishes to create his dynasty, Úrsula and José Arcadio Buendía decide to preserve class barriers by accepting the child but denying its origins.

The desire to expand the Buendía line is tempered by the need to maintain its dynastic elevation. Úrsula's restoration of the house is illustrative of the tension

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[*] "Un día de estos le cuento todo a todo el mundo y se acaban los escondrijos." (Ibid. 31)
[†] "sólo comprendía el riesgo, la inmensa posibilidad de peligro que implicaban las aventuras de su hermano" (Ibid. 31)
[‡] "Úrsula lo admitió de mala gana, vencida una vez más por la terquedad de su marido que no pudo tolerar la idea de que un retoño de su sangre quedara navegando a la deriva, pero impuso la condición de que se ocultara al niño su verdadera identidad." (Ibid. 37)
[§] The original text is ambiguous as to who imposes the condition. Rabassa is of the opinion that José Arcadio Buendía imposes the it, but in my view the syntax clearly establishes Úrsula as the subject of the sentence. Either way, one of the founders of the Buendía dynasty wants to hide Arcadio's origin.

between these two goals. The house is both a symbol of the family's continuity and coherence—it is designed to unify the Buendía family in place even as they grow farther apart in time—but it is also a recognition of the family's need to incorporate new members if it is to project itself into the future. When Amaranta and Rebeca become teenagers, "Úrsula suddenly realized that the house had become full of people, that her children were on the point of marrying and having children, and that they would be obliged to scatter for lack of space. Then she…undertook the enlargement of the house"[*] (*One Hundred* 54). Úrsula strongly associates place with continuity, and for her the future of the Buendía family depends upon the ability of the family to grow while remaining in the same place, unified by their shared location. The connection between the historical progress of the Buendía family and the house is reiterated by Úrsula when Coronel Aureliano Buendía goes to war and José Arcadio and Rebeca elope. Úrsula tells her husband to "look at the empty house, our children scattered all over the world, and the two of us alone again, the same as in the beginning"[†] (*One Hundred* 106). The credibility of the imagined community of the Buendía family depends upon the persistence of certain unifying traits across time. After her sons leave the house, it is more difficult for Úrsula to imagine the family as a coherent unit moving forward in time. The house is used to structure history by defining the relationship of the present to the past through the reification of the Buendía family.

At the same time, Úrsula recognizes that expansion is necessary to project the Buendía line into the future. Her goal is not to halt the growth of the Buendía family,

[*] "Úrsula se dio cuenta de pronto que la casa se había llenado de gente, que sus hijos estaban a punto de casarse y tener hijos, y que se verían obligados a dispersarse por falta de espacio. Entonces…emprendió la ampliación de la casa." (Ibid. 50)

[†] "Mira la casa vacía, nuestros hijos desperdigados por el mundo, y nosotros dos solos otra vez como al principio."(Ibid. 90)

but to regulate it so that it preserves the imaginative unity of the family and the social order which gives it meaning. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Thomas Sutpen cannot content himself with the construction of Sutpen's Hundred; he also needs a legitimate heir who can inherit his dynasty while maintaining the divisions of class, race, and gender, which give it power. A similar process is at work in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, where the Buendía family must find suitable heirs to continue their legacy without undermining the conditions on which its power is based. As in *Absalom, Absalom!*, these social divisions are enforced by who can and cannot enter the family house, which serves as a symbol of the family's dynastic status and continuity. García Márquez writes that "the new house…was inaugurated with a dance. Úrsula had got that idea from the afternoon when she saw Rebeca and Amaranta changed into adolescents, and it could almost have been said that the main reason behind the construction was a desire to have a proper place for the girls to receive visitors"[*] (*One Hundred* 59). When Úrsula holds the dance, "the only ones invited were the descendants of the founders, except for the family of Pilar Ternera, who by then had had two more children by unknown fathers. In reality it was a class-based selection, except that it was determined by feelings of friendship"[†] (60, translation emended). The dance, which she plans in anticipation of her daughter's marriage, is designed to project the family into the future without contaminating or diluting its social standing. The narrator explains that "those favored were not only the oldest friends of José Arcadio Buendía's house since before they undertook the exodus and the founding of Macondo, but also their sons and grandsons, who were the constant companions of

[*] "La casa nueva…fue estrenada con un baile. Úrsula había concebido aquella idea desde la tarde en que vio a Rebeca y Amaranta convertidas en adolescentes, y casi puede decirse que el principal motivo de la construcción fue el deseo de procurar a las muchachas un lugar digno donde recibir las visitas." (Ibid. 54)

[†] "Era en realidad una selección de clase, sólo que determinada por sentimientos de amistad" (Ibid. 55)

Aureliano and Arcadio since infancy"[*] (60-61). Similarly, the daughters of Apolinar Moscote, the new Corregidor, "did not manage to be considered for the party"[†] even though they are "modest and hardworking" and "the most beautiful girls in town"[‡] (61). The dance, and other functions designed to regulate the sexual relationships of the Buendía family, are aimed at maintaining the Buendía family's power in Macondo, both against outside forces like the national government and against any internal blurring of class lines. The Buendía family history turns upon the obfuscation and elision of sexual encounters between classes.

Projecting the Buendía family into the future requires the maintenance of the illusions and beliefs that justify the Buendías' power in Macondo. As a young man, Colonel Aureliano Buendía has a near-sexual experience with a young prostitute, after which "he made the calm decision to marry her in order…to enjoy all the nights of satisfaction that she would give the seventy men"[§] (*One Hundred* 52). Later, at the end of his military career, "he thought confusedly, finally captive in a trap of nostalgia, that perhaps if he had married her he would have been a man without war and without glory, a nameless artisan, a happy animal"[**] (175). This marriage to a prostitute would make Colonel Aureliano Buendía a "nameless artisan" "without glory" because the power of the Buendía family, and consequently the value of their "name" as a way of narrating history, depends upon forging marriage alliances that perpetuate myths of class that sustain their local power.

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[*] "los favorecidos no sólo eran los más antiguos allegados a la casa de José Arcadio Buendía…sino que sus hijos y nietos eran los compañeros habituales de Aureliano y Arcadio desde la infancia" (Ibid. 55)
[†] "no consiguieron que se les tomara en cuenta para la fiesta" (Ibid. 55)
[‡] "a pesar de ser recatadas y serviciales, las más bellas del pueblo" (Ibid. 55)
[§] "tomó la serena decisión de casarse con ella para liberarla del despotismo de la abuela y disfrutar todas las noches de la satisfacción que ella le deba a setenta hombres." (Ibid. 49)
[**] "Pensó confusamente, al fin capturado en una trampa de la nostalgia, que tal vez si se hubiera casado con ella hubiera sido un hombre sin guerra y sin gloria, un artesano sin nombre, un animal feliz." (Ibid. 143)

Section 2: Selective Memory and the Distortion of the Past

The repeated efforts of the Buendía family to hide their genealogical connection to Macondo's lower class end up distorting the family's understanding of its relationship to the town. Younger Buendías are unaware that they are the products of unions between Buendía and members of the lower class like Pilar Ternera and Mauricio Babilonia. Because they do not understand the vital connection between the Buendía family and Macondo, they cannot imagine a future of the Buendía family that depends on its continued involvement with the town. The family turns inwards and collapses on itself because the last Buendías make no effort to reconnect the historical narrative of the Buendías to the reality of Macondo.

The distortion of the Buendía family narrative is particularly evident in the interactions between the youngest Buendías and Pilar Ternera, their unrecognized ancestor. During Meme's romance with Mauricio Babilonia, she visits Pilar Ternera:

> "As soon as Pilar saw her come in she was aware of Meme's hidden motives. 'Sit down,' she told her. 'I don't need cards to tell the future of a Buendía.' Meme did not know and never would that the centenarian witch was her great-grandmother. Nor would she have believed it after the aggressive realism with which she revealed to her that the anxiety of falling in love could not find repose except in bed. It was the same point of view as Mauricio Babilonia's, but Meme resisted believing it because underneath it all she imagined that it had been inspired by the poor judgment of a mechanic"[*] (*One Hundred* 289).

[*] "Desde que ésta la vio entrar, conoció los recónditos motivos de Meme. 'Siéntate', le dijo. 'No necesito de barajas para averiguar el porvenir de un Buendía.' Meme ignoraba, y lo ignoró siempre, que aquella pitonisa centenaria era su bisabuela. Tampoco lo hubiera creído después del agresivo realismo con que ella le reveló que la ansiedad del enamoramiento no encontraba reposo sino en la

Even in rebellion, Meme reveals the prejudices that sustain the Buendía's historical narrative. Not only does she not know that she is a descendant of Pilar Ternera, she also associates the Buendía family with a restricted sexuality, even though it is the "indiscretions" of José Arcadio with Pilar Ternera and Arcadio with Santa Sofía de la Piedad, rather than legitimate unions, which have provided the family with children and a future.

Later, Pilar Ternera plays a similarly decisive role in the life of Aureliano Babilonia. When Aureliano discovers Pilar Ternera at *El Niño de Oro*, he "took refuge in the compassionate tenderness and understanding of his unknown great-great-grandmother. Sitting in her wicker rocking chair, she would recall the past, reconstruct the grandeur and misfortunes of the family and the splendor of Macondo, which was now erased"[*] (One *Hundred* 395). Aureliano listens to the story of Macondo and the Buendía family without understanding the vital, genealogical connection between the two. He does not know the role that the Macondo's lower class played in perpetuating the Buendía family, so he does not imagine the future of the Buendía family being the product of such a union. He befriends Nigromanta, a prostitute living in Macondo, but "although he sometimes felt the temptation and although Nigromanta herself might have seemed to him the natural culmination of a shared nostalgia, he did not go to bed with her. So Aureliano was still a virgin when Amaranta Úrsula returned to Macondo and gave him a sisterly embrace that left him breathless"[†] (386). While Aureliano Babilonia understands that the history of the

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cama. Era el mismo punto de vista de Mauricio Babilonia, pero Meme se resistía a darle crédito, pues en el fondo suponía que estaba inspirado en un mal criterio de menestral." (Ibid. 228)

[*] "Desde aquella noche, Aureliano se había refugiado en la ternura y la comprensión compasiva de la tatarabuela ignorada. Sentada en el mecedor de bejuco, ella evocaba el pasado, reconstruía la grandeza y el infortunio de la familia y el arrasado esplendor de Macondo" (Ibid. 309)

[†] "Aunque algunas veces sintió la tentación, y aunque a la propia Nigromanta le hubiera parecido una culminación natural de la nostalgia compartida, no se acostaba con ella. De modo que Aureliano seguía

Buendía family and Macondo are linked, he does not understand that both the family and the town must be actively perpetuated to sustain meaning. Instead, he sees the Buendía family as a dynasty, removed and above Macondo, and thus finds his sister more suitable to the continuation of the Buendía line.

Pilar Ternera, the first to be excluded by the Buendía family's desire to perpetuate class distinctions, seems to be aware of the inevitable inward turn that will bring about the destruction of the Buendías. When Aureliano Babilonia tells her about his feelings for Amaranta Úrsula, she says, "Wherever she is right now, she's waiting for you"* (*One Hundred* 396). The narrator explains that "there was no mystery in the heart of a Buendía that was impenetrable for her because a century of cards and experience had taught her that the history of the family was a machine with unavoidable repetitions, a turning wheel that would have gone on spinning into eternity were it not for the progressive and irremediable wearing of the axel"† (396, translation emended). Pilar Ternera's metaphor neatly describes the conflict between the imagined community history of the Buendía family and the forces of natural time. The Buendía family seeks to preserve the social order that gives the family power and prestige as they move through time, but doing so requires them to deny the possibility and historical fact of relationships across class. As time and the changing social reality of the world displace the family from the center of Macondo's imagined community, the family's historical narrative becomes more and more insular, impotent to build a future in a world it no longer explains. The breakdown of the

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siendo virgen cuando Amaranta Úrsula regresó a Macondo y le dio un abrazo fraternal que lo dejó sin aliento." (Ibid. 301-302)

* "En cualquier lugar en que esté ahora, ella te está esperado." (Ibid. 310)

† "No había ningún misterio en el corazón de un Buendía que fuera impenetrable para ella, porque un siglo de naipes y de experiencias le habían enseñado que la historia de la familia era un engranaje de repeticiones irreparables, una rueda giratoria que hubiera seguido dando vueltas hasta la eternidad, de no haber sido por el desgaste progresivo e irremediable del eje." (Ibid. 309-310)

family's relationship with the town destroys the axel on which the Buendías' historical narrative turns. As ghosts of a social order that no longer exists, the last Buendías cannot imagine a future with anyone except each other.

Section 3: Great Buendías, Isolation, and Fatalism

When Amaranta Úrsula and Aureliano Babilonia begin their affair, the long distortion of the family's genealogy pushes Amaranta Úrsula and Aureliano Buendía towards the ghost-like perspective of José Arcadio Buendía and José Arcadio Segundo. Because they do not appreciate the symbiotic relationship between the town and the family, they do not account for it in their imagination of the future. Instead, they perceive the history of the Buendías as a history of "great men" who shape society. Rather than attempting to imagine a future within Colombia's historical narrative, they hope the family will be restored by the birth of another "great Buendía" who can reorient Macondo's social order around the historical narrative of the Buendía family. This disjunction between historical narrative and reality produces the fatalism that dooms the Buendía family.

Amaranta Úrsula and Aureliano Babilonia's affair represents a final denial of the dependence of the Buendía family narrative on the events of the outside world. As soon as they begin their relationship, all of the progress Amaranta Úrsula made towards restoring the house when she intended to live with Gaston is reversed. García Márquez writes:

> "In the bewilderment of passion she watched the ants devastating the garden, sating their prehistoric hunger with the beams of the house…but she bothered to fight them only when she found them in her bedroom. Aureliano abandoned the parchments, did not leave the house again, and carelessly answered the

> letter from the wise Catalonian. They lost their sense of reality, notion of time, the rhythm of daily habits. They closed the doors and windows again so as not to waste time getting undressed"[*] (405)

Amaranta Úrsula and Aureliano Babilonia abandon the upkeep of the house at the same time that they shut themselves off from the rest of the world. The two acts reflect a denial of natural time, which continues to work against the family. By privileging the family narrative over their present reality, Amaranta Úrsula and Aureliano Babilonia embrace the fatalism that ultimately leads Aureliano to search for his destiny in the prophecies of Melquíades, written a hundred years earlier (415). Aureliano Babilonia's decision to abandon their translation does not mean that he does not believe in them, but rather that he is confident enough in the eternal historical narrative of the Buendía family that he does not feel any urgent need to complete the translation.

Only the imminent birth of their child makes Amaranta Úrsula and Aureliano Buendía speculate about the future, and even then, "the uncertainty of the future made them turn their hearts toward the past"[†] (*One Hundred* 408). The narrator recounts:

> "At night, holding each other in bed, they were not frightened by the sublunary explosions of the ants or the noise of the moths or the constant and clean whistle of the growth of the weeds in the neighboring rooms. They could hear Úrsula fighting against the laws of creation to maintain the line, and José

[*] "El aturdimiento de la pasión, vio las hormigas devastando el jardín, saciando su hambre prehistórica en las maderas de la casa, y vio el torrente de lava viva apoderándose otra vez del corredor, pero solamente se preocupó de combatirlo cuando lo encontró en su dormitorio. Aureliano abandonó los pergaminos, no volvió a salir de la casa, y contestaba de cualquier modo las cartas del sabio catalán. Perdieron el sentido de la realidad, la noción del tiempo, el ritmo de los hábitos cotidianos. Volvieron a cerrar puertas y ventanas para no demorarse en trámites de desnudamiento" (Ibid. 316-17)

[†] "La incertidumbre del futuro les hizo volver el corazón hacia el pasado." (Ibid. 319)

> Arcadio Buendía searching for the mythical truth of the great inventions, and Fernanda praying, and Colonel Aureliano Buendía stupefying himself with the deception of war and the little gold fishes, and Aureliano Segundo dying of solitude in the turmoil of his debauches, and then they learned that the dominant obsessions can prevail against death and they were happy again with the certainty that they would go on loving each other in their shape as apparitions long after other species of future animals would steal from the insects the paradise of misery that the insects were finally stealing from man"[*] (411).

Amaranta Úrsula and Aureliano Babilonia are not concerned with reconciling reality and the imagined community history of the Buendía family. They, like José Arcadio Buendía, no longer see death as a meaningful threshold by which to mark the passage of time. Even as they hear Úrsula "fighting against the laws of creation to maintain the line," they are unperturbed by the destructive work of natural time. The solipsism of the Buendía narrative is so profound that Amaranta Úrsula and Aureliano conflate the Buendía household with the world. Ants and moths are destroying the house, but they are not stealing this "paradise of misery" from the Buendías, they are stealing it from "man."

[*]"De noche, abrazados en la cama, no los amedrentaban las explosiones sublunares de las hormigas, ni el fragor de las polillas, ni el silbido constante y nítido del crecimiento de la maleza en los cuartos vecinos. Muchas veces fueron despertados por el tráfago de los muertos. Oyeron a Úrsula pelando con la leyes de la creación para preservar la estirpe, y a José Arcadio Buendía buscando la verdad quimérica de los grandes inventos, y a Fernanda rezando, y al coronel Aureliano Buendía embruteciéndose con engaños de guerras y pescaditos de oro, y a Aureliano segundo agonizando de soledad en el aturdimiento de las parrandas, y entonces aprendieron que las obsesiones dominantes prevalecen contra la muerte, y volvieron a ser felices con la certidumbre de que ellos seguirían amándose con sus naturalezas de aparecidos, mucho después de que otras especies de animales futuros les arrebataran a los insectos el paraíso de miseria que los insectos estaban acabando de arrebatarles a los hombres." (Ibid. 321)

The disintegration of the link between the Buendía family and the town allows Amaranta Úrsula and Aureliano to continue imagining their family's continuation as the result of "great men" rather than of a sustained interdependency with the town itself. When Amaranta gives birth to the last Buendía, she "could see that he was one of those great Buendías, strong and willful like the José Arcadios, with the open and clairvoyant eyes of the Aurelianos, and predisposed to begin the race again from the beginning and cleanse it of its pernicious vices and solitary calling"[*] (*One Hundred* 412). Aureliano says, "We'll call him Aureliano and he'll win thirty-two wars" (412). They seem unaware that when José Arcadio Buendía began "the race" of Buendías and founded Macondo, he did so with people who had been friends of his "house" since "before they undertook the exodus"[†] (60), or that Colonel Aureliano began his wars with the sons of the founders of Macondo. Amaranta Úrsula and Aureliano Babilonia, isolated in the ruins of the Buendía house in a town that has long since forgotten the Buendía name, cannot realistically expect to "begin the race again" or to "cleanse it of its…solitary calling." The last Buendía ultimately becomes "a dry and bloated bag of skin that all the ants in the world [drag] toward their holes,"[‡] consumed by the creatures who have come to represent the natural, catastrophic time that had been threatening to destroy the Buendía family for years.

Much like the Southern aristocracy in *Absalom, Absalom!*, the legitimacy of the Buendía family's social position depends upon the illusion of an impermeable and

[*] "Amaranta Úrsula vio que era un Buendía de los grandes, macizo y voluntarioso como los José Arcadios, con los ojos abiertos y clarividentes de los Aurelianos, y predispuesto para empezar otra vez por el principio y purificarla de sus vicios perniciosos y su vocación solitaria" (Ibid. 321-322)
[†] "los favorecidos…eran los más antiguos allegados a la casa de José Arcadio Buendía desde antes de emprender el éxodo que culminó con la fundación de Macondo" (Ibid. 55)
[‡] "Era un pellejo hinchado y reseco, que todas las hormigas del mundo iban arrastrando trabajosamente hacia sus madrigueras" (324)

eternal boundary between Macondo's social classes. To maintain this illusion, the genealogy of the Buendía family is intentionally distorted to hide the sexual relationships between the Buendías and members of the lower class. As time progresses, the heirs to the Buendía legacy continue to define themselves through this vision of historical continuity, which is neither accurate nor productive. As reality and family narrative move further apart, the Buendías must turn in upon themselves to sustain the myth of their social superiority. In doing so, they deny the objective progress of natural time, which poses an existential threat to the future of Macondo and the Buendía family. Like the fatalism of the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*, the fatalism of the Buendía family is self-imposed by individuals who find meaning in the history of a community that no longer exists.

Conclusion: A Family without Second Chances

The fatalism which ends *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the result of a two-fold process of displacement and distortion that turns the historical narrative of the Buendía family into a residual artifact of an earlier epoch. Like Southerners after the Civil War, the youngest generations of the Buendía family are unable to reimagine the world in a way that preserves their sense of self. Instead, they cling to an imagined community history that does not explain the present and misrepresents the past. With no accurate understanding of the links between their family and Macondo and no way of reestablishing the political and social control of their forefathers, they doom themselves to the fate that Melquíades and Pilar Ternera foresaw: attempting to repeat the past until the forces of natural time destroy the axel upon which their understanding of family and community turns. In their attempt to preserve the power

and prestige of the family, they embrace to a historical narrative that no longer has meaning for the community it describes and bring upon themselves their insular, incestuous fate.

Conclusion: Family, Identity and Meaning

"What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?
One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever." —Ecclesiastes 1.3-4

A significant body of scholarship asserts that the modern novel and the modern nation-state are both manifestations of a type of historical thinking that emerged during the Enlightenment, and critics like Philip Weinstein have persuasively argued that modernist and post-modern novels such as William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* represent a challenge to the authority and accuracy of that way of thinking. But as Benedict Anderson points out, the origin of such historical thinking lies much earlier, in the dynastic and religious communities that organized pre-Enlightenment Europe. *Absalom, Absalom!* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* do not just challenge the understanding of time that justifies and legitimizes nations, they depict the conflict between these national historical narratives and the dynastic narratives that preceded them, they explore the existential trauma that occurs with the displacement of either type of historical narrative, and they reveal the assumptions and attitudes about family and lineage upon which each particular strain of historical thinking relies to justify its social order.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Faulkner and García Márquez portray the competition between two mutually exclusive historical narratives not solely with regard to the pragmatic consequences of such a struggle, but also in terms of the questions that struggle raises about the nature of time and man's place in it. The various ways of imagining time that are proposed in each novel reflect

the threat that time itself poses to any belief in the possibility of moral authority and spiritual fulfillment. The historical narratives of the South and Macondo attempt to reconcile the transient present of each passing generation with the cosmic scale of time, because only through belief in the continuity of history can the Sutpens, Compsons and Buendías find profit in their labor.

The idea of the family—and particularly the notion of male heirs—is prominent in both novels because it represents the most compelling case for continuity between and across generations. Familial inheritance and the concept of time as an ordered and objective measure of history's advance are co-dependent and mutually reinforcing. For both dynasties and nations, imagined community history equates man's role as heir and progenitor with his place in history. Incest and the dilution of supposedly pure bloodlines are twinned and recurring threats in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* because inheritance must be regulated for the family to provide spiritual as well as material solvency. The members of privileged families need to believe that their position in society is permanent and inalterable to be absolved of whatever "moral brigandage" produced the current social order. Whether it is Thomas Sutpen and José Arcadio Buendía looking for sons to perpetuate their legacy or Charles Bon and Aureliano Babilonia looking for families whose stories can give them the sense of meaning they are denied by the present, families are the medium through which individuals connect themselves to the imagined multitudes of the dead and the yet unborn.

When the imagined communities that govern the South and Macondo are disrupted by the growing power of the American and Colombian national states, the characters of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* react either by imagining themselves as ghosts of their original communities or by losing any ability

to relate to the past or imagine the future. The ghostly perspective of Rosa Coldfield, José Arcadio Segundo and Aureliano Babilonia does not represent a new way of imagining time, but rather the logical consequence of identifying with a historical narrative after the community that it explained has ceased to exist. The historical thinking that explains imagined communities conflates time and history, so when the history of a community ends, time must end as well. All three find meaning through their connection to their families, but none can provide that family a future.

Alternatively, Quentin Compson and Colonel Aureliano Buendía recognize the continued progress of time, but are unable to explain their present through the historical narratives with which they were taught to identify. Both feel an irreconcilable tension between their family and their present. Unable to imagine a productive future for themselves and unable to link the present to the past, all seems vanity and vexation of spirit.

In the second chapter of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson writes that "the great merit of traditional religious world-views (which naturally must be distinguished from their role in the legitimation of specific systems of domination and exploitation) has been their concern with man-in-the-cosmos, man as a species being, and the contingency of life" (10). The existential struggles of the characters of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* demonstrate the difficulty of making such a distinction. The historical narratives that provide transcendental meaning to Southerners and Macondans, to Sutpens, Compsons, and Buendías, do so by legitimizing their privileged position in the social order of their communities. When that order is destroyed, the individuals who found meaning in its historical narrative are left impotent, without a way to understand themselves, their relationships, or the

new communities of which they, recalcitrant and unwilling, have ineluctably become a part.

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